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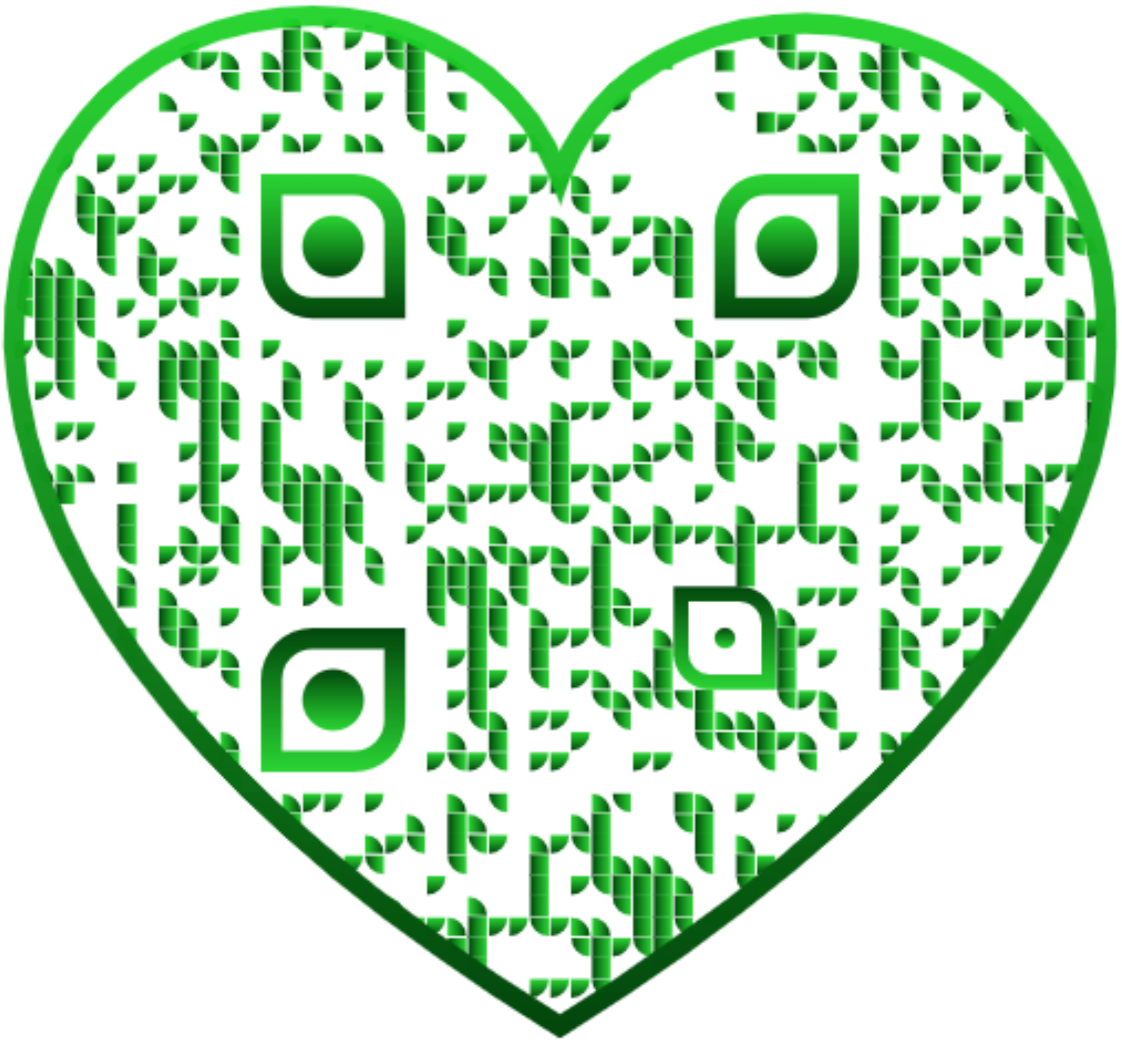

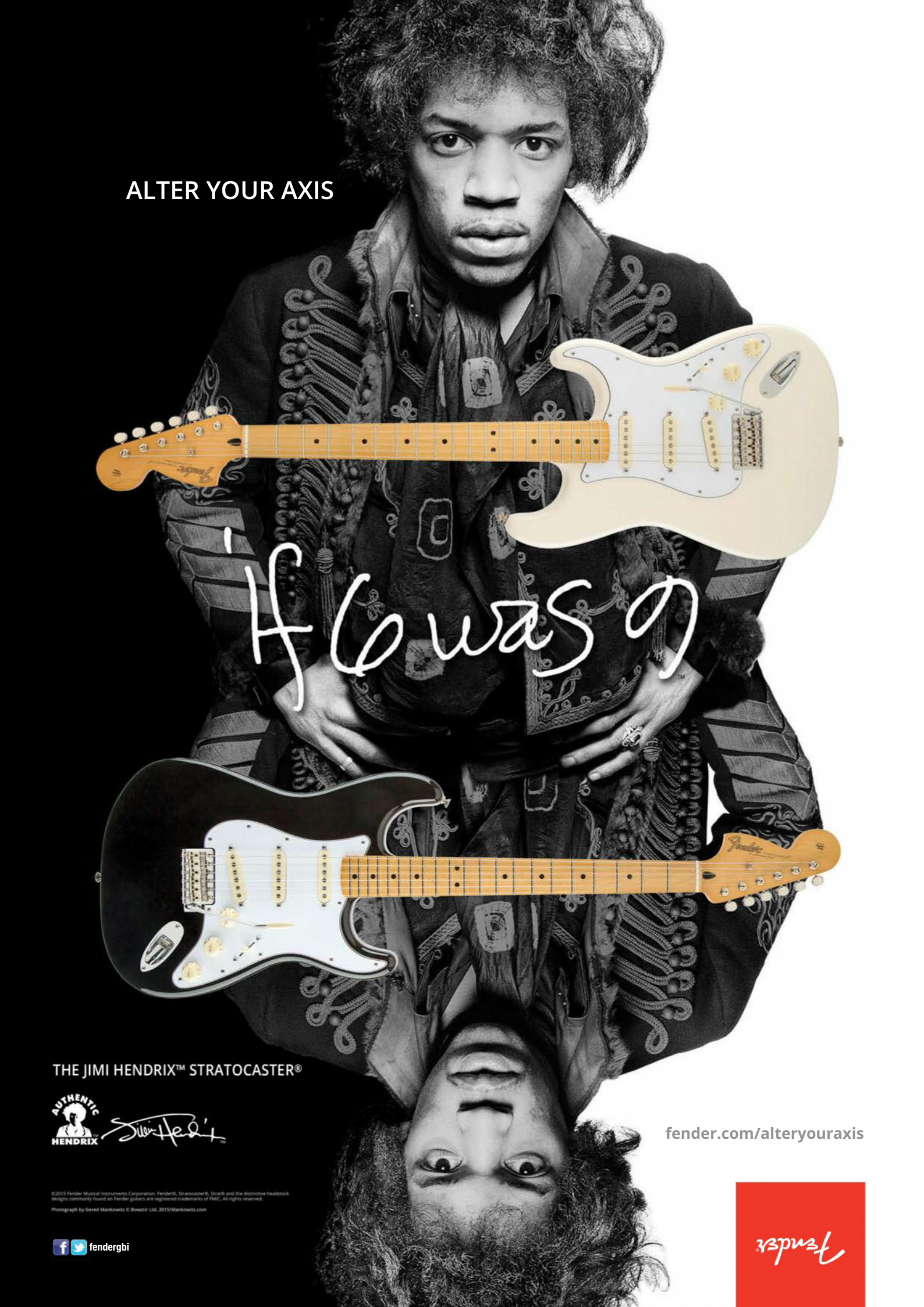
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The myth of tone...

Nashville is synonymous with the kind of crisp country cleanliness that the Fender Custom Shop Masterbuilt Yuriy Shishkov '55 Tele on this month's cover delivers in abundance. Yet these days, 'the Nashville sound' could just as easily refer to the explosive fuzztones of Jack White and Dan Auerbach. And there's a lot more to that gorgeous Telecaster than just twang, too.

There are thousands of legendary guitar tones in the annals of popular music, all of them great because of the way they function in the context of a particular composition and arrangement. Despite that, guitarists often talk about 'tone' in the singular, as if there's an objectively superior, Holy Grail guitar sound that we should all aspire to achieve. This is, of course, a load of old cobblers. A guitar, an effects pedal or even your rig as a whole doesn't have inherently great tone. In the hands of the right player, it may produce a tone that you or I think, subjectively, to be great. But that's different.

Sure, you'll play better and feel better if you enjoy the way your rig sounds, which in turn will make your audience respond more positively, whether this manifests itself in the form of applause from a packed house or a reduction in the amount of angry banging on the wall from the old dear next door. But before you bow down at the altar of 'tone' – and most of us have been there at some point – try considering the painting as a whole rather than obsessing about the way that the handle of your brush has been manufactured. After all, this is art, rules are there to be obliterated and if something sounds right then it is right; an unselfconscious peformance will always win the hearts and minds of your audience more readily than anything else. See you next month...

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Turn to **page 52** to take advantage of this month's special *Guitar & Bass* subscription offer.

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THIS MONTH'S EXPERTS...

DAVE HUNTER

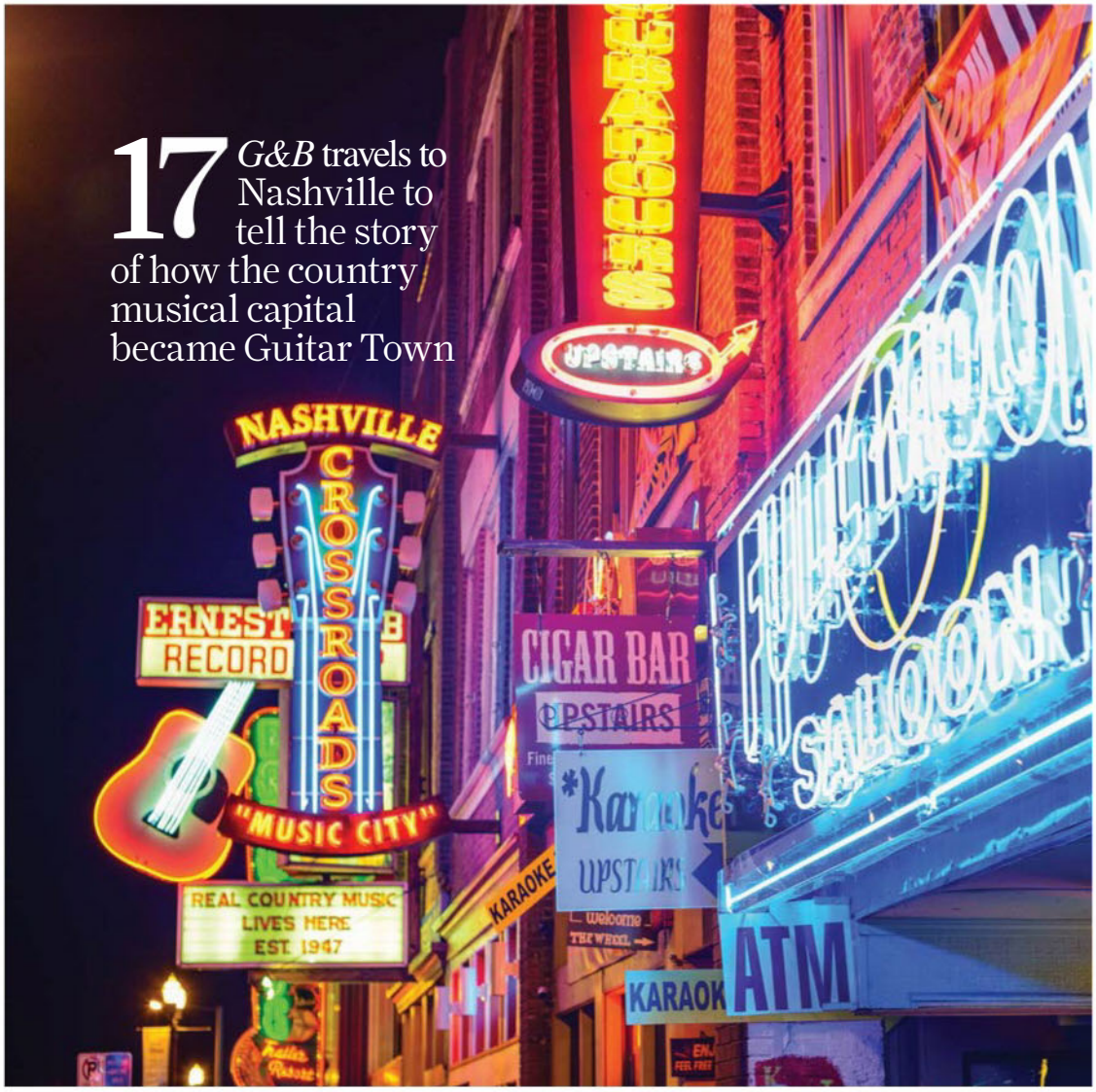
Dave Hunter is a writer and musician who has worked in the US and the UK. A former editor of this title, he is the author of *The Guitar Amp Handbook*, *Guitar Effects Pedals*, *Amped* and *The Fender Telecaster*. Check out his column on page 10.

HUW PRICE

Huw spent 16 years as a pro audio engineer working with the likes of David Bowie, Primal Scream and NIck Cave. His book *Recording Guitar & Bass* was published in 2002, sparking a career in guitar journalism. He also builds and maintains guitars, amps and FX.

RICHARD PURVIS

A reformed drummer, Richard has been gigging for over 20 years as a guitarist and bassist, and working as a music journalist for almost as long. He also composes music for television, and is legally married to his 1966 Gibson Melody Maker.



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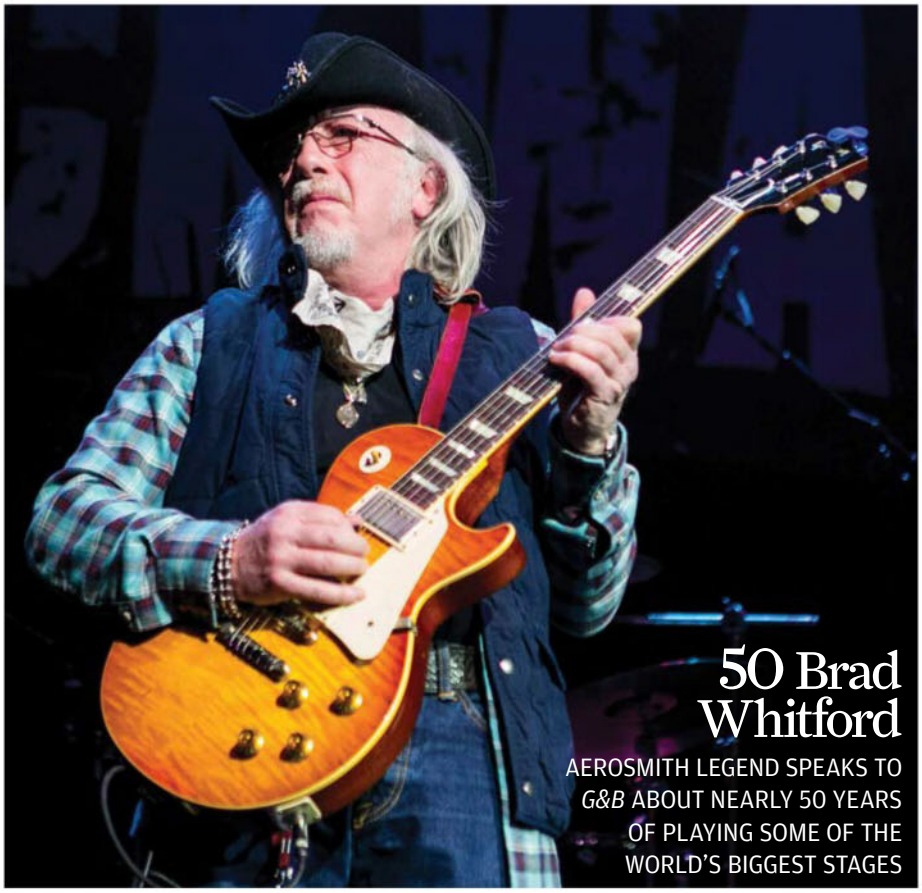

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Opening bars...

Emerging talent on our radar and your chance to road test a PRS guitar for a year for *Guitar & Bass*

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A PRS GUITAR FOR A YEAR!

Wanted! Three road-testers to put a trio of PRS electrics through their paces in 2016

Have you ever fancied writing for *G&B* and telling us what you really think? Thanks to the chaps at PRS Guitars Europe, now's your chance. Three lucky competition winners will each get to be custodian of a USA-built PRS instrument for a year; all we ask in return is that you tell us what you think of the guitars in the form of four regular progress reports that we'll print in the mag and online throughout 2016. The tasty instruments in question are a PRS Brent Mason in Antique White (worth £2,590), an S2 Custom 24 with bird inlays in Blue Crab Smokeburst (worth £1,375) and an S2 Vela with dot inlays in McCarty Tobacco (worth £1,289).

To qualify for entry you'll need to be a regular gigging or recording guitarist who can also provide us with a photograph to accompany each of your reports (this needn't be a professional picture, a phone camera snap is fine). At the end of the 12-month loan period you'll be given the option to purchase the instrument at an attractive, discounted rate.

To enter, please tell us, in no more than 200 words, a little about the gear that you currently use, your current band (with links if possible), which guitar you'd prefer and why. Email your entries to guitarandbass@anthem-publishing.com by 5 February 2016 to be in with a chance.

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ONES TO WATCH

Inglorious

RISING STARS UNITED BY CLASSIC INFLUENCES

British hard-rock act Inglorious are gearing up for a breakthrough year in 2016, with their uncompromising, riff-packed eponymous debut album set to land in February and a European tour with The Winery Dogs already in the diary.

The band are fronted by former Trans-Siberian Orchestra vocalist Nathan James, with Swedish guitarist Andreas Eriksson and Will Taylor, from the North East of England, handling six-string duties. They were drawn together through auditions last year, with the initial brief to provide live backing for an album James had co-written and recorded with Queen's Neil Fairclough. Quickly bonding over shared classic-rock influences, it became clear that this was less a temporary alliance of sessioneers and more a band of brothers, and they resolved to record an album of their own.

Taylor, who moved to London prior to securing the Inglorious gig, explains: "Nathan had recorded an album himself with Neil Fairclough. He was looking for musicians to play it, and once the auditions were over and the band was picked, it took a very different turn when he realised how much everyone involved wanted to be a band. He realised it would maybe have been a bit of a waste to just be Nathan James.

"When people ask what kind of music we play, it's easy to say classic rock. We take our influences from Deep Purple and early Whitesnake, guys like that, but we weren't born in that era and gear has moved on, so the sound is inevitably slightly different. We're a heavy blues-rock band without resting too heavily on the blues side of things."

The newly recruited band quickly set about recording an album, turning their management's Berkshire headquarters into a live-in studio, with James insisting on an unpolished, live feel with few overdubs.

"We were all living in the small rooms there," says Taylor. "Colin, the bass player, was sleeping in the control room, me and Andreas were sleeping in the live room, most nights I was on an airbed and my headboard was a Marshall stack. It doesn't get much closer to the music than that.

"Because we wanted to record the album as live as possible, it was supposed to be a test run or rehearsal, so we went to our then-management's headquarters on the grounds of this big stately home and started recording as we were rehearsing. We got maybe two songs in and there was a silent agreement that it was going very well and we said 'let's keep going' and just carried. It was never really supposed to be the album."

The band's gear is as traditionally rock-oriented as their influences. "Andreas is a Les Paul player and we're both Gibson and Marshall guys," says Taylor. "I used a Marhsall DSL into a 4x12 Marshall cab [for the album sessions], and I'm in love with my Firebird. In my opinion, they're the coolest-looking guitar and they feel great, too. I've got a 2014 Firebird with the Steinberger tuners, so it doesn't smack on the floor when you let go of the headstock.

"My pedalboard is dead small. I tend not to use much because I like the sound of the amp. I've got a Custom Tube Screamer, a Tremonti Power Wah and an MXR Micro Amp at the end of the effects loop, and Andreas uses his Micro Amp as a Tube Screamer, and a Tube Screamer as a Tube Screamer as well! We've got very similar and simple setups."

The tour with The Winery Dogs, which will be followed by a string of the band's own UK dates, sees them opening for an act who are among their musical idols. "We love The Winery Dogs, and Colin's hero is Billy Sheehan," says Taylor, who lists his own biggest influences as Slash and Steve Lukather. "He's got a similar style and sound. We named his preset sound in the studio 'asbo bass' because it's disgusting and anti-social! Our album is out on 19 February. From then on, we're doing a week or two of our own dates in some smaller venues, which will be nice and intimate after the stages we'll be on with The Winery Dogs. 2016 is going to be full of playing, playing, playing..." **GW**

For details of Inglorious' dates with The Winery Dogs and their headline UK tour, visit www.inglorious.com

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Deep Purple, Aerosmith, Whitesnake*

GEAR *Inglorious*

- **GUITARS** Gibson Firebird, Gibson Les Paul
- **AMPLIFIERS** Marshall DSL
- **PEDALS** Ibanez Tube Screamer, MXR Micro Amp, Morley Mark Tremonti Power Wah

Letters from America

This beautiful Swedish-built 'burst marries classic Les Paul and Telecaster-style looks with fine luthiery. **DAVE HUNTER** sings the Blues...

DAVE HUNTER
Dave Hunter is a writer and musician who has worked in the US and the UK. A former editor of this title, he is the author of numerous books including *The Guitar Amp Handbook*, *Guitar Effects Pedals*, *Amped* and *The Fender Telecaster*.

I first encountered Johan Gustavsson's Bluesmaster Custom 59 in the ether, via word of mouth and fevered forum discussion. What was this gorgeous beast that melded classic designs, cost nearly twice as much as a Gibson Custom Les Paul reissue, and promised the closest thing available to circa '59 Burst tones? Some years later, I finally got my hands on one, and perhaps the most surprising aspect of the experience was how immediately I determined that owning such a guitar would be worth every penny of the steep asking price. Word often has it that Gustavsson is able to capture 'old-wood tone' and 'vintage-guitar feel' in his new creations. Spoiler alert: somehow or other, he really does, and it's a wonderful thing.

Now, this guitar presents something of an anomaly in my monthly Letters column, seeing as it's not made in the United States. It is, however, more readily available Stateside than just about anywhere else, and there are two official US dealers I know of. Otherwise, most sales go directly through the maker.

Johan Gustavsson is based in Limhamn, Sweden, and learned woodworking by crafting custom furniture. A guitarist himself, he was inevitably drawn to luthiery and has been building fine instruments for 30 years. He began formulating the design for what would become the Bluesmaster back in 1993, and finally released his flagship model in 2001. An elegant marriage of what he calls his "two favourite solidbodies" – the Les Paul and the Telecaster – the instrument clearly owes far, far more to the former, although the familiar reverse-S curve of the Fullerton-inspired upper bout and other subtle details form a constant reminder that we're a long way from any Les Paul clone or copy. The guitar I acquired for testing remains true to the original formula, although we can assume that Johan has refined his craft over the years.

We're looking at the work of a builder who is adept at capturing his refined aims in wood, wire and metal

But enough of the esoteric rambling; why on earth is this guitar so feted? How can it be this good? Both are difficult to answer in simple terms. And yet, while I'm against prescribing any ephemeral magic to an instrument crafted by human hands from readily available organic materials, we are looking at the work of a builder who is adept at capturing his refined aims in wood, wire and metal.

Other than the few instruments that occasionally land at his two US dealers – CR Guitars and Destroy All Guitars – Gustavsson's creations are essentially custom-built, so some specs will vary, but the Bluesmaster Custom 59 as a standard model does have many consistent features. Johan goes to some lengths to select and acquire the woods, and the obvious quality of the one-piece mahogany back (solid, in this case, but chambering is available) and flamed eastern maple top attest to the effort.

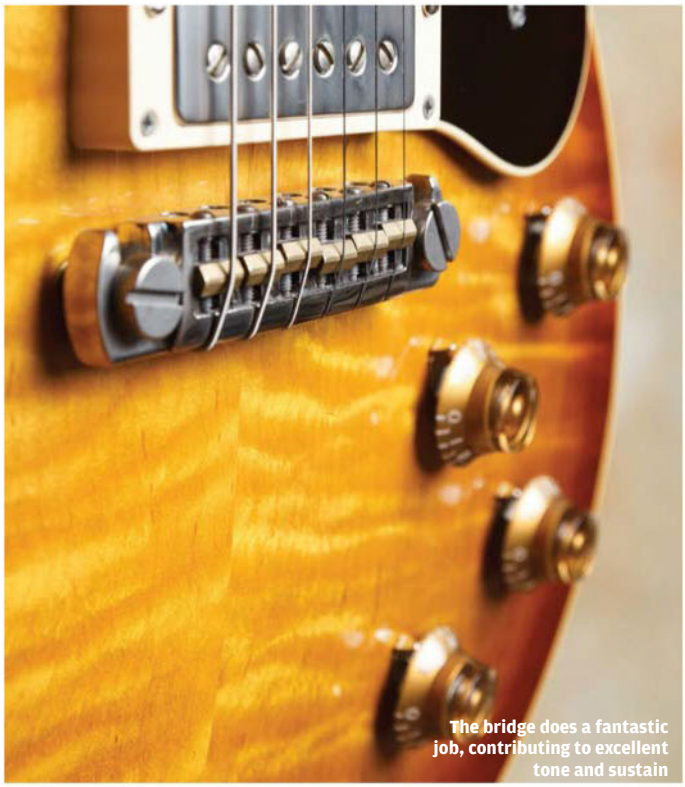
The former has a tightly

KEY FEATURES

Johan Gustavsson Bluesmaster Custom 59

- **PRICE** £5,799 to £6,995 (depending on options)
- **BODY** Mahogany back with carved maple top
- **NECK** Glued-in mahogany neck with Round '59 profile
- **FINGERBOARD** Rosewood, 12" radius (CITES certified Brazilian rosewood available)
- **FRETS** 22 medium-jumbo nickel-silver
- **PICKUPS** Two Throbak SLE 101 MXV Ltd humbuckers
- **ELECTRICS** Dual volume and tone controls, three-way switch
- **FINISH** Thin high-gloss nitrocellulose lacquer with no plasticizers
- **HARDWARE** Gustavsson intonatable wraparound bridge, Kluson Deluxe keystone tuners
- **STRINGS** Ernie Ball .010"-.046"
- **CASE** G&G custom rectangular hardshell case
- **CONTACT** JGGuitars.com sales@jgguitars.com

The full C profile neck sits very comfortably in the hand



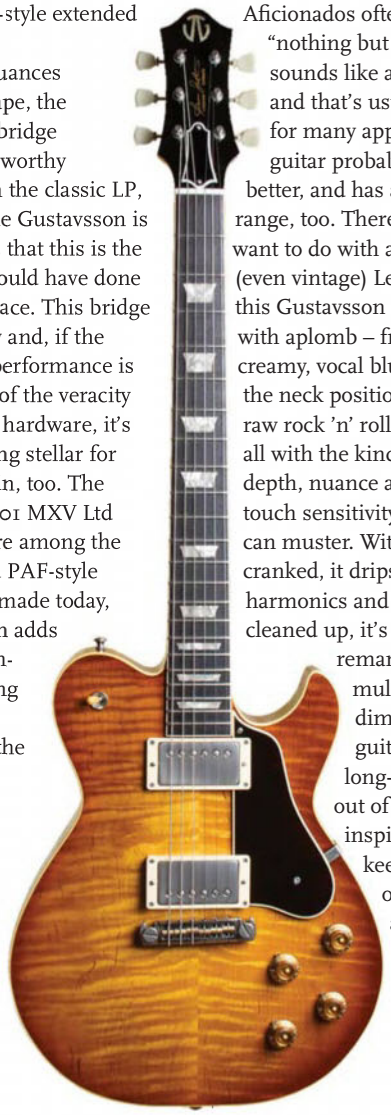
The bridge does a fantastic job, contributing to excellent tone and sustain

flecked grain beneath the trans-cherry back and neck finish, while the latter displays a subtly elegant, non-bookmatched flame that appears realistic circa '59, with the kinds of characterful mineral streaks and irregularities that Burst aficionados often enjoy, beneath an artfully faded Cherry Sunburst finish. Although straight-on photos don't reveal it well, there's a sultry feel to the Bluesmaster's top carve, too – curves that reveal a mastery of the arching process that is strangely difficult for some builders to achieve, but which looks just right here. We're already getting to a big part of that 'old-wood feel'; put the right ingredients together, and render them with old-world artistry, and you're a long way toward creating a 'new vintage' experience.

The other big part of this 'vintage feel' equation is the neck profile, and this one feels superb. The rounded '59 shape is perhaps the most popular profile these days, yet it's puzzling how many makers stumble at that hurdle. The study of many original late 50s Les Pauls in the course of his training clearly helped Gustavsson to get this one just right, and it's a full C shape that fits the curve of the palm beautifully, extending into comfortably soft shoulders and a rolled binding at the fingerboard edge that inspires you to wrap the hand around that sucker and play. The neck on this example has a depth of around .876" at the first fret and .970" at the 12th, although Johan will also do you a Slim 60s profile that starts at .822" or '58 Soft V and Fat U shapes that both start the ride at .925" and rise to a full inch. All the little details are acquitted in a manner that inspires the utmost confidence: the binding and other plastics have that just-right look, as do the acrylic trapezoid inlays, and the headstock shape and logos on a glossy holly veneer exude class – one of the variations from the iconic Gibson headstock that I don't find wrong. The headstock's 17-degree back angle also hits right at vintage-LP specs, as does the '59-style extended neck tenon.

Alongside nuances in the body shape, the Bluesmaster's bridge is another noteworthy departure from the classic LP, but let's assume Gustavsson is trying to tell us that this is the way Gibson should have done it in the first place. This bridge works superbly and, if the guitar's sonic performance is any indication of the veracity of this piece of hardware, it's doing something stellar for tone and sustain, too. The ThroBak SLE 101 MXV Ltd humbuckers are among the most respected PAF-style pickups being made today, and Gustavsson adds individual push-pull coil splitting to the tone controls to up the versatility.

I played the Bluesmaster Custom 59 through a Komet 60 and a custom-made JTM45-style creation, and was wowed at every turn.



Aficionados often declare that "nothing but a Les Paul sounds like a Les Paul", and that's usually true, but for many applications this guitar probably sounds better, and has a broader range, too. There's little you'd want to do with a genuine (even vintage) Les Paul that this Gustavsson couldn't tackle with aplomb – from thick, creamy, vocal blues tones in the neck position to snarly, raw rock 'n' roll in the bridge, all with the kind of sonic depth, nuance and hotwired touch sensitivity that few LPs can muster. With the Komet cranked, it drips with textured harmonics and rich depth; cleaned up, it's still remarkably multi-dimensional. It's a guitar that feels long-played-in right out of the case, inspiring you to keep going. Play one if you get a chance.

THE HOLY GRAIL GUITAR SHOW 2015

Berlin's Holy Grail Guitar Show provides a stage for the world's finest independent luthiers. **LARS MULLEN** reports from Germany...

Over the weekend of 31 October to 1 November 2015, no fewer than 115 of the world's finest luthiers from 28 countries downed tools and gathered at the Estrel Hotel Convention Centre in Berlin for the Holy Grail Guitar Show. It offered a range of exquisite and innovative handmade acoustic, electric and bass guitars under one roof, from the most avant-garde to the staunchly traditional.

The show was attended by nearly 1,500 dyed-in-the-wool guitar geeks and enthusiasts, with two large halls filled with hundreds of the finest custom-made instruments imaginable. It was organised by a group of European luthiers, who formed the European Guitar Builder Association after feeling they weren't getting a fair chance to show their work at the larger international expos – NAMM and Frankfurt's Musikmesse for example.

Now in only its second year, word has spread fast about the show, and guitar makers travelled from countries such as Argentina, Mexico, Japan, Italy, France, Finland, USA, Canada and Iceland to display their wares.

There were no cranked amps (no amps at all in the exhibition halls, just dedicated sound cabins), giving visitors the opportunity to talk to guitar makers on a one-to-one basis, while independent luthiers could network and see each other's designs – the air was thick with passion for their craft.

"The Holy Grail Guitar Show is the biggest international custom guitar show on the planet", says Juha Ruokangas, one of the show's organisers and a founding member of the EGB. "It's not been designed for the industry, you won't find any of the major brands here. We are in Berlin, with what you might call the European luthiers' movement that's stepping out from the shadows of the big trade shows, which are designed for the industry and the big players. If we go there, we are in the corners in little booths. Here, there aren't any amps and no large advertising boards, and everyone has the same floor space, the atmosphere is calm and positive."

Among the many wonderful luthiers *G&B* spoke to, the UK was represented by JJ Guitars, A.J. Lucas, Bordello Guitars, David Antony Reid, and Dan MacPherson, who commented: "There's nothing else like this show, it's not for the hobbyist or guys who want to put kits together, this is for the pros, there's some serious guitar building here."

Sam Evans, of Cardinal Instruments, said: "If you think you're good, you've got to prove it, and this is the place."

Celebrating 36 years in the business, Swiss maker Claudio Pagelli said: "It's wonderful to meet so many high-quality guitar makers, this makes me continually push myself to the next level. It takes time to build at this quality, I only make six a year."

Ruokangas added: "The Holy Grail Guitar Show is a celebration of the handmade guitar, but whilst many exotic tone woods are used within their construction, you won't find the wood suppliers here. Sure, they are our valuable cooperative partners, but we wanted to purify this show so that the focus is 100 per cent on the artist and their art. Like an art exhibition with an extension to music. With the same analogy, you have famous artists showing their paintings, but you wouldn't see the canvas or oil suppliers beside them promoting the materials, that would be almost devaluing the painter's art.

"We told all our cooperative partners that their role in this show is not to exhibit at the tables, but to become sponsors, so you can make it more affordable to these luthiers, who are not rich people, to come to the show and show their work and sell guitars so they can buy more materials from you.

"More and more suppliers are understanding the values of this now, many are here as visitors and they see what me mean and are shaking my hand after seeing their wood within the construction of many guitars here, they agree that this concept really is working. We are all on a good track here."

For more information, check out The Holy Grail Guitar Show website at holygrailguitarshow.com. >

1 Dubre Guitars luthier Pierre Boserup Dubre with the Con Amore Piccolo electro-acoustic bass **2** Sauvage Guitars 'One Piece Master' **3** Marchione Guitars, USA, 'Premium' hollow archtops. **4** Tyyster Guitars Finland, Pelti **5** The Red Sting **6** Canada's Linda Manzer with custom steel-strung acoustic with sitar bridge and custom archtop **7** Modular instruments from Basslab's STD and L-Bow series **8** Tapa Kay **9** Island Instrument Manufacture, Canada, wooden guitar **10** Vice Guitars, Germany, Vice Vasuki **11** Thierry Andre Guitars, Canada, multi-strung archtop with 12 strings, 2 bass subs and Lace Sensor pickups **12** Grellier Guitars France, HGGS Podcaster Special **13** Prabel Guitars, France, 'The Melting' **14** Rainer Tausch, Germany, Custom Art guitar **15** Neubauer Guitars, Austria, twin-cutaway 'Mizzi', Blond 'Vienna' archtop **16** Chris Larkin, HGGS ASAS Leonardo Archtop **17** Devil's Choice Germany, Manticore and 5-string Trapjaw bass **18** Danou Guitars, Switzerland, one-piece Tamangur bass **19** Heeres Guitars, Netherlands, double-neck MIDI guitar **20** Seth Baccus Guitars, Portugal, Nautilus Modern **21** Alquier Guitars, France, bamboo bass

22 Distorted Branch Custom Guitars, Mexican-themed guitar and Xuul Katun 8-string bass **23** Ruokangas Guitars, Finland, Unicorn **24** Jersey Girl Home Made Guitars, Parade (left) and Audery 6474 **25** Pagelli Guitars, Switzerland. Massari Ltd Ed Archtop (left) and Pagelli 36th Anniversary acoustic **26** Princess Isabella, The Blue Dragon Ltd **27** Le Fay Guitars, Germany, fan frets, twisted headstock, thin-bodied bass guitars **28** XXL Guitars, Canada's Marc Lupien with an XXL III model **29** Mervyn Davis Guitars, South Africa, Smooth Talker series **30** Melo Guitars, Spain **31** Steinbrecher Guitars, Germany, X3 models from the Stromer series of solidbodied electrics **32** Teuffel Guitars, Germany, four guitars from the Prodigy series, including 20th Anniversary model (second from left) **33** Ramos Guitars, Spain Jammer Series 5-string bass (left), left-handed six-string Oculus guitar **34** Marleaux Bass Guitars, Germany, Diva with fretless maple board **35** Preacher Topless model in lime yellow, fitted with Stetsbar vibrato

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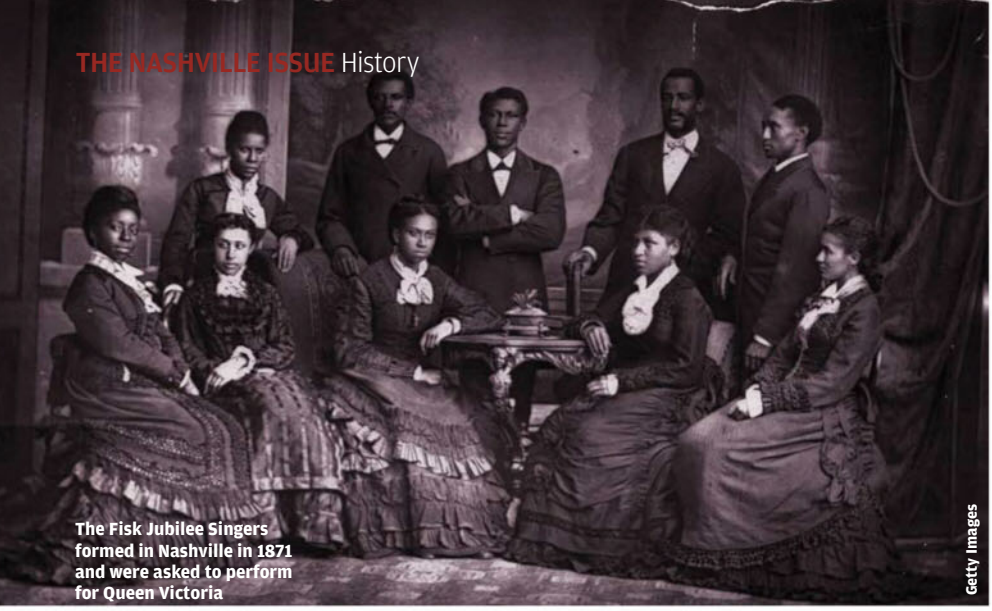
Guitar Town

Nashville is synonymous with country music, but there's a lot more to it than that. The Tennessee state capital boasts an enviable wealth of diverse talent and hosts some of the world's finest recording studios. And guitars, guitars, guitars!

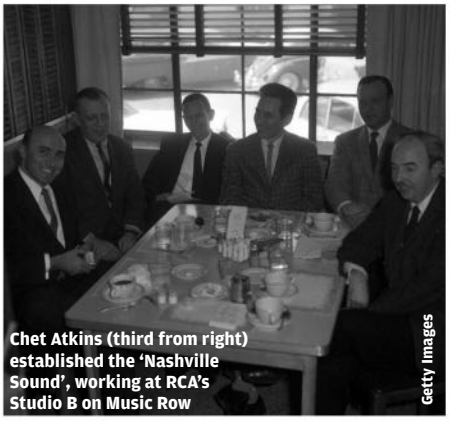
Story **Michael Stephens** | Photography **Getty Images**

The Home Of Country Music. Music City. Guitar Town. Nashville, Tennessee, has earned many epithets over the years and it's still a city thriving on music. From the first influential USA radio stations to current stars such as Kings Of Leon, Nashville continues to spawn phenomena. Gibson Guitars' HQ and main factory is in Nashville. As is Carter Vintage Guitars. And George Gruhn's vintage store is a unique treasure trove of fretting heaven... but, as with any city, times change. This is the guitar-centric story of a city that keeps evolving. >



The Fisk Jubilee Singers formed in Nashville in 1871 and were asked to perform for Queen Victoria

Getty Images



Chet Atkins (third from right) established the 'Nashville Sound', working at RCA's Studio B on Music Row

Getty Images

Flatt & Scruggs and the Foggy Mountain Boys performing at the Grand Ole Opry in the late 1950s

Getty Images

The rise of a music city

Nashville is rarely considered a rock 'n' roll glamour-fest like Los Angeles or New York, but the city is steeped in music. If you wish to go way back, hymnal publishing started in Nashville in the 1820s, and the years after the Civil War saw the formation of the Fisk Jubilee Singers. They even performed for Queen Victoria. In the 1890s, the Union Gospel Tabernacle was renamed The Ryman Auditorium, and by the early 20th century, the Ryman had earned a reputation as the 'Carnegie Hall of the South'. Music, if then built on the light opera and gospel singing of the time, was flowing in Nashville.

But it was the 1920s and 1930s when everything changed. Nashville's hugely influential WSM radio station started broadcasting, including the Grand Ole Opry show, based at the Ryman. By the 30s, the live radio show was four hours long and a huge draw for both listeners and performers across more than 30 US states. Country legends Hank Williams and The Carter Family were regular stars.

In basic terms, if you wrote or sang country songs, Nashville had become the place to be. Hopeful country and bluegrass musicians flocked to the city, as did the music business. Before long, the Acuff-Rose music publishing company was born; in the 1950s, influential record labels Castle and Bullet prospered with proto rock 'n' roll.

The Opry itself remains an oddity, though. Even in the 1970s, it had a non-negotiable rule: "No rock and roll". What? Many performers fell foul of its stringent policy and populus. The Byrds were invited to play in 1968, but the trad-country-lovin' audience were dismissive of these darn longhairs, even with their sweet country guitar licks. The Opry old-schoolers heckled and laughingly jeered "Tweet tweet!" even though The Byrds' love of country music was clearly genuine. The booing reportedly made Gram Parsons cry after performing.

Membership of the Opry nevertheless remains one of the crowning achievements for a country artist. Thankfully, Nashvillle isn't all about the Opry...

The Nashville Sound

By the early 1950s, Chet Atkins had built a rep as a superlative guitar player across various US recordings and studios. He said he learned by copying Merle Travis as he listened to him on the radio. And was eventually even greater. Chester/Chet rose to be a design consultant for Gretsch from 1955 – his input on great Gretsch guitars remains significant to this day. The RCA Victor label decided Chet was their man. Mr Guitar, as Chet was known, became manager of RCA Victor's Nashville studio, eventually inspiring and overseeing the completion of the soon-legendary RCA Studio B, the first studio built specifically for the purpose of recording on Nashville's now-famous Music Row.

Yet, in some ways, Chet's move may have been a bad one. Atkins was such a talented guitarist – one of the best ever – and could possibly have made more albums showcasing his dazzling dexterity. His duet album with Les Paul, *Chester & Lester*, sounds of its time but is still bewildering in fretwork terms. Two of the 20th century's greatest guitarists ripping it up with a grin.

But, in Nashville, Chet Atkins was also taking care of business. As 'pure' country music was losing out to rock 'n' roll, Chet oversaw (with fabled producer Owen Bradley and engineer Bill Porter) a new sound – the so-called Nashville Sound. It won't rock your socks these days, but it took country/hillbilly music into a new realm.

Under Chet's tutelage, RCA's Studio B had the goods. EMT plate reverbs, improved baffles, designated close mic positioning for recording guitar. The songs, by whomever, were recorded live. And then, again. Until the take was damn perfect. Country, gradually, became popular music and then simply 'pop'. As master country guitarist Marty Stuart puts it, "Studio B, to me, is a cathedral of music."

But, at heart, Atkins was a guitarist. Mark Knopfler was smitten when he got the call to record with Chet, for the 90s duet album *Neck And Neck*.

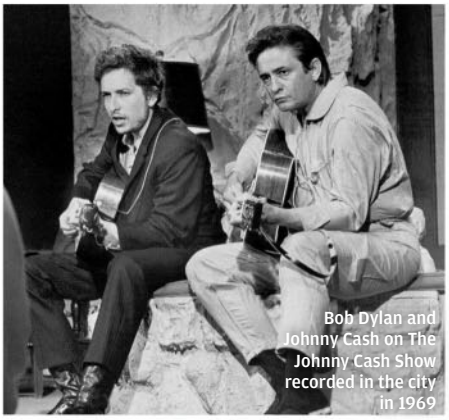
"I hit it off with Chet immediately," Knopfler remembers. "It was one of those great things that turned into a friendship. We used to go off to breakfast a lot together

and hang out a lot. I also had a very good relationship with my publisher in Nashville, it was a chap named David Conrad who was also a friend of Chet's, and so it was just good to have some guys there who were helping to break the ice. It became quite a regular call for me to be over there in Nashville.

"Just hearing Chet talk about those [older] days, you would be learning from him. For instance, I remember Chet showing me a certain RCA microphone and describing how they got that bass drum thing to happen on the recording. I think that was the first time that a bass drum got amplified I believe, it had a mic in it like that.

"I think what a lot of people forget is that for a long, long time Chet was making all kinds of records. He managed to get through a hell of a lot of music, it was unbelievable really. And when you think about all the people he produced, it's unreal."

In the book, *Heartaches By The Number: Country Music's 500 Greatest Singles*, musicologist David Cantwell argues that Elvis Presley's *Don't Be Cruel* (1956) was the record that sparked the beginning of the era known as that of the Nashville Sound, even if the recording took place in a different state entirely at RCA New York.



Bob Dylan and Johnny Cash on The Johnny Cash Show recorded in the city in 1969

> "Chet was making all kinds of records. It was unbelievable. When you think about all the people he produced, it's unreal"
>
> **MARK KNOPFLER**

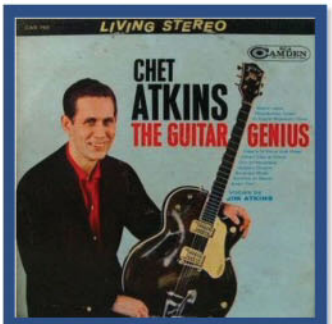
Nashville producer Owen Bradley reckoned, "Now we've cut out the fiddle and steel guitar and added choruses to country music. But it can't stop there. It always has to keep developing to keep fresh." And it did develop. Yet Chet Atkins himself was ambivalent about his elevation to RCA vice president. He recalled, "I wanted to be known as a guitarist and I know, too, that they give you titles like that in lieu of money. So beware when they want to make you vice president."

Then again, Atkins also had wry humour when talking about the Nashville Sound. When once asked how he'd define the Nashville Sound, Chet put his hand into his pocket, shook his loose change, and said, "That's what it is. It's the sound of money."

Nashville Skylines

All the while, artists kept flowing to Nashville. There was Bob Dylan's groundbreaking *Blonde On Blonde* (1966), of course. Dylan had normally recorded in New York, but the good folks of Music City wanted to lure him there just to see what could happen...

Multi-instrumentalist Charlie McCoy has worked on thousands of Nashville sessions since the early 1960s – for Roy Orbison, Kris Kristofferson, Paul Simon, Waylon Jennings, Tanya Tucker... as well as making records as a solo artist, and as a member of band Area Code 615. McCoy was also Dylan's right- >



CHET ATKINS

★ **NOTABLE BECAUSE?** Atkins (1924 - 2001) was known as "Mr Guitar" and "CGP" - Certified Guitar Player. 14 Grammys, Lifetime Grammy Award, Rock and Roll Hall of Fame award. Numerous production credits (including Elvis, The Everly Brothers, Jerry Reed) that spawned the Nashville Sound. Design consultant for Gretsch Guitars. Pioneered and managed Nashville Music Row's Studio B. Vice president of Nashville's RCA Victor label. Numerous sessions, hits and albums, including duet LPs with Les Paul, Jerry Reed, Mark Knopfler and Tommy Emmanuel.

★ **MAIN GUITARS** Gretsches (Country Gentleman, 6120, Tennessean, various signature models), Gibsons (L-7, Super 400, signature CE Classical Electric, L-10). D'Angelico Excel.

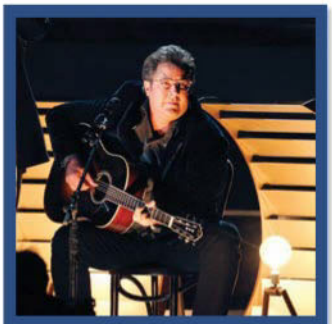
"Hearing Chet was like being hit in the stomach. It was like a hammer. I realised whatever he was doing, that was what I've got to do."
Tommy Emmanuel

JERRY REED

★ **NOTABLE BECAUSE?** Reed (1937-2008) was a wizard fingerpicker, singer, TV host and actor. Reed had Elvis sing on his hit *Guitar Man*. Nashville RCA sessions for Elvis and Willie Nelson, duet albums with Chet Atkins and many more. Eric Johnson paid homage, with *Tribute To Jerry Reed*, in 2005, saying "I became entranced with his style. He was one of the first country guitarists to do advanced right-hand technique similar to a steel-guitar player." Famous for picking classic The Claw. Reed was also a comic bon viveur. His 'divorce' hit *She Got The Goldmine (I Got The Shaft)* and *Ugly Woman* give a hint.

★ **MAIN GUITARS** Baldwin nylon-strings, Gretsch 6120, Peavey electrics, various Gibsons and Fenders.

"You've gotta love guitar. Love sitting down with it 18, 20 hours a day. I did it and I don't regret a minute of it. I lived with that instrument day and night for 25 years. That's what it takes to get better."

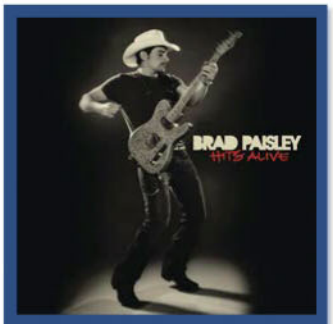


VINCE GILL

★ **NOTABLE BECAUSE?** Nicknamed "The Triple Threat" because Gill plays guitar, sings and writes, all dazzlingly well. Over 20 solo albums across country, pop and rock, 26 million sales, plus 20 Grammy Awards. Mark Knopfler asked Gill to join Dire Straits... but Gill had plans of his own. Sessions for everyone from Bonnie Tyler to the Moody Blues to Kelly Clarkson. Recipient of Irving Waugh Award of Excellence in music. The only other country music artist to receive this accolade was Johnny Cash.

★ **MAIN GUITARS** Fender Strats and Teles, Gibson CF-100 and J-200, Gibson Lloyd Loar mandolin, Martin acoustics (one, a limited-run shallow-bodied 0000 model designed by George Gruhn). Gill has many guitars!

"Country always strays away and then comes back, strays away, comes back. There's no rule to how it has to be, how it should be."



BRAD PAISLEY

★ **NOTABLE BECAUSE?** Like Gill, an artist who shines as a vocalist, songwriter and musician. Fender Telecaster maestro and a staggeringly gifted guitarist. Grammy and CMA (Country Music Association) Awards aplenty. Went to Afghanistan to play for US troops. Got invited to play at the White House personally by Barack Obama. When not recording or performing, Paisley runs a farm. Poster boy for modern Nashville.

★ **MAIN GUITARS** Fender Telecasters mainly, bespoke amplifiers built by Tony Bruno, Dr Z.

"It's a very smart, progressive bunch, these people that make country music. They're not country hicks sitting behind a desk with a big cigar, giving out record deals and driving round in Cadillacs with cattle horns on the front grille: it's a bunch of really wonderful, open-minded, great people down on Music Row that make this music."

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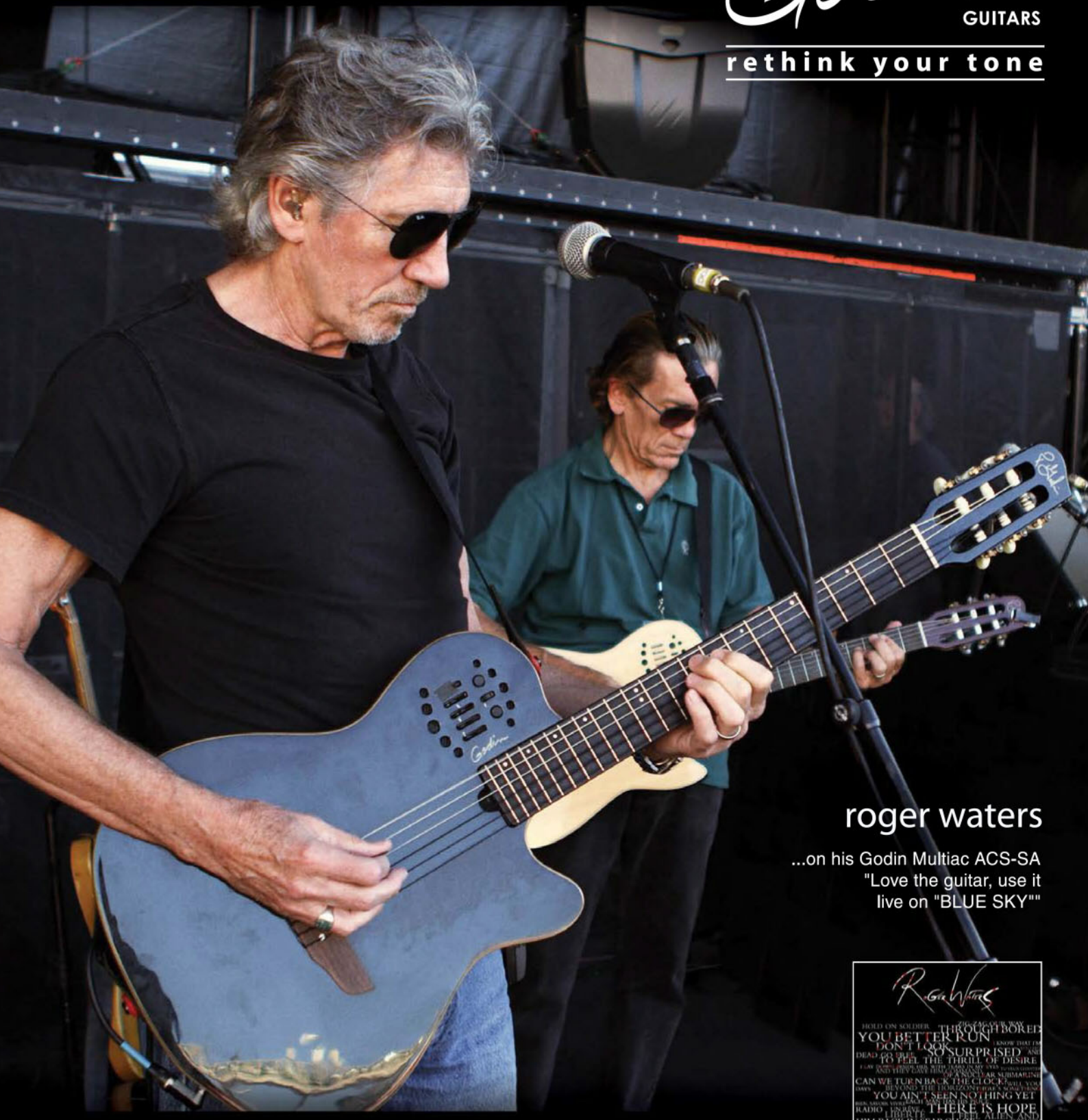

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Music Row writer Harlan Howard coined the term 'three chords and the truth'

hand guitar and bass man for the albums *Blonde On Blonde*, *John Wesley Harding* and *Nashville Skyline*.

In a 1980s interview, McCoy reckoned: "One of the neat things that happened here was the fact that Owen Bradley and Chet Atkins were such great musicians in their own right. I worked for a lot of producers out of New York and all who weren't really music people. They were more just like organisers. Whereas Owen and Chet were both very, very fine musicians. So it really changed a lot. I think that the sound of the records reflect – hey, here's a musician in charge of this, because you can hear every instrument. The mixing was just really outstanding.

"There's some very fine musicians in Los Angeles. Most of them have moved to Nashville! It was like the floodgates opened after Bob came. People started coming, like The Byrds, Buffy Sainte-Marie, Joan Baez, Leonard Cohen... it was almost like, oh, OK, if Dylan went there, then it must be OK." Elvis Presley's RCA recordings were in Nashville. Country 'outlaws' Willie Nelson, Johnny Cash and Waylon Jennings recorded there, too, bringing their own songs and breaking the grip of the professional songwriting teams of Music Row. Legends were coming, the hits were flowing...

Nashville tunes and tunings

As the guitars kept-a-twangin' and increasingly rockin', Music City even spawned its own tuning: Nashville tuning.

A kind-of hybrid 'banjo on the guitar' tuning, Nashville Tuning is not credited to any individual per se, but became a staple of session players in Guitar Town. Simply, you replace the wound E, A, D and G strings on a six-string guitar with lighter-gauge strings to allow tuning an octave higher than standard. 12-string sets were often used, rather than actual banjo strings.

Nashville Tuning appears a lot in rock history beyond its hometown, and you may never have realised it. Pink Floyd's *Hey You* (from *The Wall*) and Kansas's *Dust In The Wind* are in 'Nashville'. So is Mick Taylor's part in the Rolling Stones' *Wild Horses*. Even James Williamson on *Gimme Danger* by The Stooges. Elliott Smith used variations of >

BRENT MASON

★ **NOTABLE BECAUSE?** Massive session history as well as solo records. Two-time winner of the CMA Musician of the Year Award. Grammy Award for Best Country Instrumental Performance. 12-times winner of the ACM Guitarist Of The Year Award. Synonymous with chicken pickin', but Mason is highly skilled at playing anything. Credits include Alan Jackson, Alabama, Brooks & Dunn, George Strait, Neil Diamond, Rascal Flatts, Brad Paisley, Merle Haggard, Vince Gill, Shania Twain, Willie Nelson and many others artists.

★ **MAIN GUITARS** PRS signature model, 1965 Fender Strat, '68 Fender Tele, '56 Gibson Les Paul, Jerry Jones Baritone

"A lot of people use the same references: Coldplay, Rolling Stones, Matchbox 20, stuff like that. I study what's going on, and that's how you stay relevant. When you start getting too predictable, that's when your career is going to end."

DANN HUFF

★ **NOTABLE BECAUSE?** Huge history of session playing and producing in country, rock and pop. Credits include Michael Jackson, Keith Urban, Mariah Carey, Chaka Khan, Amy Grant, Joe Cocker, Whitney Houston, Madonna, Smokey Robinson, Faith Hill, Rascal Flatts, Celine Dion, Shania Twain... a seemingly endless list across many different genres.

★ **MAIN GUITARS** James Tyler guitars. Peavey amps.

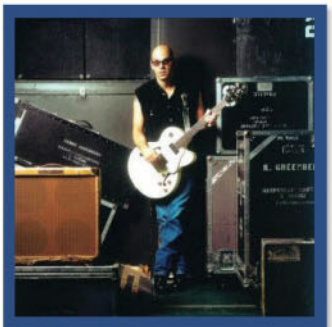
"When you start making the composition as a whole sound better, that's when producers will scoop you up. You're there to frame a song and to make the artist sound the best they can possibly sound. It's not about you."

JERRY MCPHERSON

★ **NOTABLE BECAUSE?** A slew of credits across all genres in modern-day Nashville and beyond, for both veterans and new artists: Faith Hill, Toby Keith, Carrie Underwood, Amy Grant, Rascal Flatts, Reba McEntire, Kenny Rogers, Dolly Parton, Donna Summer, John Tesh, Coldplay, Kelly Clarkson...

★ **MAIN GUITARS** Fender Telecasters, PRS guitars.

A big part of my sound revolves around layering a lot of different effects and creating textures. If I want to hear that kind of a sound and a keyboard player isn't on the track, I have to find a way to come up with it."



KENNY GREENBERG

★ **NOTABLE BECAUSE?** Two Grammy Awards, several hit songs as a writer. Played on a huge amount of hit records for Taylor Swift, Carrie Underwood, Brooks & Dunn, Gretchen Wilson, Willie Nelson, Kenny Chesney, Wynonna Judd, Lee Ann Womack, Toby Keith, Etta James, Mandy Moore, Jewel, Indigo Girls, Joan Baez...

★ **MAIN GUITARS** Various PRSs, Fender Teles and Strats, Gibson J-45

"The thing about sessions now is it's not about chops and shredding. You've got to have a vocabulary in a variety of different genres. In Nashville, you need to be able to play rock 'n' roll equally as well as hillbilly music."

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Nashville Tuning on a 12-string for his lauded *XO* album. Johnny Marr, too, used Nashville on The Smiths' swansong *Strangeways Here We Come*.

Nashville to Rockville?

As the decades passed, Nashville became less of a 'stetson and boots' city and simply drew in artists looking for superb studios, the best sessioneers, songwriting savvy, great guitar shops and the Music City vibe. There was probably no turning point, but Steve Earle's Guitar Town debut was maybe emblematic.

Earle is reverent of country music, and a very fine songwriter to boot. Back then, he was far from your typical Nashville musician. He was a hell-raiser. Left-wing. Outspoken. And partial to heroin, too. However, even Earle got his ass kicked by the Nashville drill.

He recalled: "I got to town in November of 1974, when I was 19. I spent a year trying to be a Nashville songwriter. I had to deal with a publisher and I went into the office every day. And I learned a lot about structure because I got a lot of practice at the craft side of it."

Bob Dylan appearing on The Johnny Cash Show at the Ryman Auditorium in 1969

> "Ray Price was there, Hank Cochran was there, Roger Miller was there – they had the most incredible staff in town at one time"
>
> **STEVE EARLE**

Earle loved the songs of Music Row writer Harlan Howard (who coined the phrase "Three chords and the truth") and other writers, and he got some help. Earle never made it as a Music Row songwriter, but was bowled over by the talent in Nashville.

"Harlan is one of my very, very favourite people," Earle remembered. "I was lucky enough to get onto the tail end of the old order in Nashville, and the old order always allowed for some cool stuff to happen here and there. I met Hank Cochran during that period... Ray Price was there, Hank was there, Willie Nelson was there, Roger Miller was there – they had the most incredible staff in town at one time. And they were writing hits. They were writing motherfucking hits!"

Earle remains a hit-less wonder to many, though his fans know how great his records are. His 1988 album *Copperhead Road* was another reinvention of Nashville. It's kinda country, but rocks like a mutha. Earle and those who followed signalled a 're-branding', if you like, of Nashville. The Opry was and is still going. But in the 80s Nashville grew into a more rounded music city.

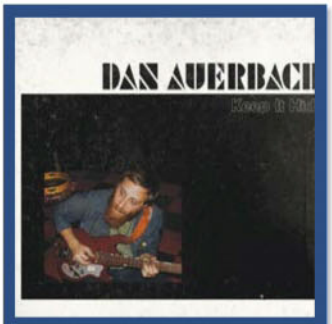
The rise of MTV had changed a lot for Nashville. Even established country stars started making videos. Still The Home Of Country Music, yes, but Music City said it best. Outside the glamour den of LA, Nashville was generating more music income than anywhere else in the USA. Three of the most lauded US guitar acts of modern times >

JACK WHITE

★ **NOTABLE BECAUSE?** Rebooted raw blues with The White Stripes. Acclaimed albums with The Dead Weather and The Raconteurs. Two solo albums, eight Grammy awards. Expert at old-school recording techniques with off-kilter vintage guitars and amps. Detroit-born but moved to Nashville. His Third Man Records label is in Music City and revitalised vinyl revival.

★ **MAIN GUITARS** Montgomery Ward Airline "JB Hutto", Crestwood Astral II, Gretsch Penguin, Kay Hollowbody, Customised Gretsches (Triple Jet, Jupiter Thunderbird, Anniversary Jr Green Machine).

"I write what I write, and some people might think one thing and other people something else. It sometimes feels a little bit like this is a conversation from the 1960s, when people like Dylan broke those barriers down. I shouldn't have to have this conversation now."



DAN AUERBACH

★ **NOTABLE BECAUSE?** Formed The Black Keys in Akron, Ohio, now based in Nashville. Auerbach's blues influences include Junior Kimbrough, Howlin' Wolf and Robert Johnson, as well as a wealth of bluegrass songs. The Black Keys' acclaimed *El Camino* album (2011) took them to arenas. Follow-up *Turn Blue* (2014) reached Billboard #1. Seven Grammys, including Producer Of The Year. Like White, Auerbach plays what some think are oddball guitars.

★ **MAIN GUITARS** Harmony H78, Harmony Stratotone, Silvertone U1, Silvertone 1429, National Westwood 77, Teisco Del Ray, Framus 5/629 12-string acoustic, 1953 Gibson Les Paul... and that's just for starters.

"I'm not married to any [guitar] brand or model. Whatever guitar has the best character for the song is the one I want to use, because if you've got a style, you're going to sound like yourself no matter what guitar you play."

The Black Keys' Dan Auerbach is another Nashville resident

Getty Images

Charlie McCoy performing with Nashville Cats at the opening weekend of the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum in 2015

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Eleanor Jane

Kings Of Leon are among the many bands to move to Nashville

Getty Images

are based in Nashville: The Black Keys' Dan Auerbach, Jack White and the Followill family of the Kings Of Leon. None are Nashville-born. They chose to move there, for the love of music.

Kings Of Leon have set up their very own label, Serpents And Snakes Records, signing local bands including Turbo Fruits and The Features, as well as rockers The Weeks, Snowden and Clear Plastic Masks. In 2015, Caleb and Nathan Followill spearheaded Nashville's own music and food festival, Music City Eats.

Caleb Followill recently spoke of a 174-year-old Nashville house that KOL are currently occupying to write their next album due later this year. "It's a really rad place and I think we can do something cool with it," he said. "And you know if we go in there and it sounds like shit, we can just go across the street to our [Nashville] studio."

Jack White's Third Man Records is in Nashville, too. Although a Detroit native, the relocated White was the first recipient of the Music City Ambassador Award in 2011. City Mayor Karl Dean noted the sea-change: "Whenever I talk about the diversity of music found in Nashville... Jack White's name always comes up." For his part, White said: "It feels like I've lived here for 50 years. I am always gonna live here."

For Auerbach, a huge bluegrass fan, moving to Nashville "definitely influenced me and inspired me. I've always been such a fan of country music, and bluegrass music in particular. My favourite musical moments when I was a kid were the family reunions, when everybody would get together and play bluegrass. That's the only reason I wanted to play guitar: so I could learn how to play those songs with my family, and sing those harmonies and those Stanley Brothers songs and stuff like that. Moving to Nashville feels like I'm closer to that feeling every day."

That said, Auerbach admits the music of Nashville is now so diverse, there's no "Nashville Sound" anymore. "There's so many different worlds going on at once that don't even really connect, ever," he says. "I don't know anybody from the pop-country world. I know some musicians who do those sessions, and the way that they describe them to me is insane. They'll cut, like, 25 songs in an afternoon, never see the singer, never hear the finished product and they get paid. It doesn't seem musical to me. It's bizarre.

"But I personally have always loved music history, and I've always been attracted to old music and I've always loved records, always loved country music, and it's still exciting for me to be in Nashville, because this is where all that shit went down. It's still exciting to me."

> "I've always been attracted to old music and it's still exciting to be in Nashville, because this is where all that shit went down"
>
> **DAN AUERBACH**

Nashville remains a huge draw for musicians of all stripes. Country, rock, pop, bands, solo artists, session players... it doesn't matter anymore. The Home Of Country Music now has an open-door policy. It's become a melting pot.

The Final words go to veteran Nashville sessioneer Charlie McCoy: "I still believe the key to Nashville's success is that people here really care. I think the studio musicians here have a way that, when they're in a session with somebody for these three hours, Joe Blow is just as important as Garth Brooks. I really think that's the key to Nashville's success."

Like Motown, like Merseybeat, the Nashville Sound is musical history these days. But there is no doubt that Nashville sounds move on and on and on...

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Guitar George

No visit to Nashville is complete without a trip to Gruhn Guitars. *G&B* meets its owner, the world's leading authority on vintage American electric and acoustic guitars and related instruments

Story **Chris Vinnicombe** | Photography **Eleanor Jane**

"My mother always said, 'George, you need to be diversifying, you're putting all your money into guitars and you're not saving anything for retirement. We have retirement accounts and we have some stocks and mutual funds and you have all your money in guitars', and I said, 'Mom, don't worry, I don't put it all in guitars, I have banjos and mandolins, too."

Though never "strictly guitars", when it comes to the great American guitar brands, George Gruhn has a level of interest that goes way beyond obsession. Born in New York, Gruhn's first love was zoology, and he was already collecting snakes at the age of eight when his family relocated to Pittsburgh. The fascination with all things zoological would continue through Gruhn's educational career, during which he studied the psychology of animal behaviour at the University Of Chicago. After a semester at the University Of Tennessee in Knoxville, Gruhn abandoned his doctorate, moving to Nashville in early 1969 when Hank Williams Jr came calling, after the country star had heard from Sonny Osborne of the Osborne Brothers' bluegrass group that the young student had lots of old Martin guitars.

45 years after opening in a 20x60-foot space with an inventory of 22 instruments, after many years on Broadway, Gruhn Guitars is now situated in its largest facility yet at 2120 8th Avenue South. While his beloved reptiles gaze on from glass tanks and two black and white cats dart around in the shafts of Tennessee sunshine that stream through the barred windows of his office, Gruhn explains how guitars got their claws into him.

"I didn't buy my first guitar until I started college," Gruhn remembers. "I have a brother three and a half years younger than me who started playing guitar before I did, but I had a driver's licence before he did, so I drove him around to look for guitars, and to look for his first good one when he wanted to step up to something better. And I discovered how much better used and old acoustics sounded than the new ones, and that got me rather interested. I found I could use the basic same observational skills that any zoological taxonomist would use and apply it to guitars."

> "I found I could use the basic same observational skills any zoological taxonomist would use and apply it to guitars"

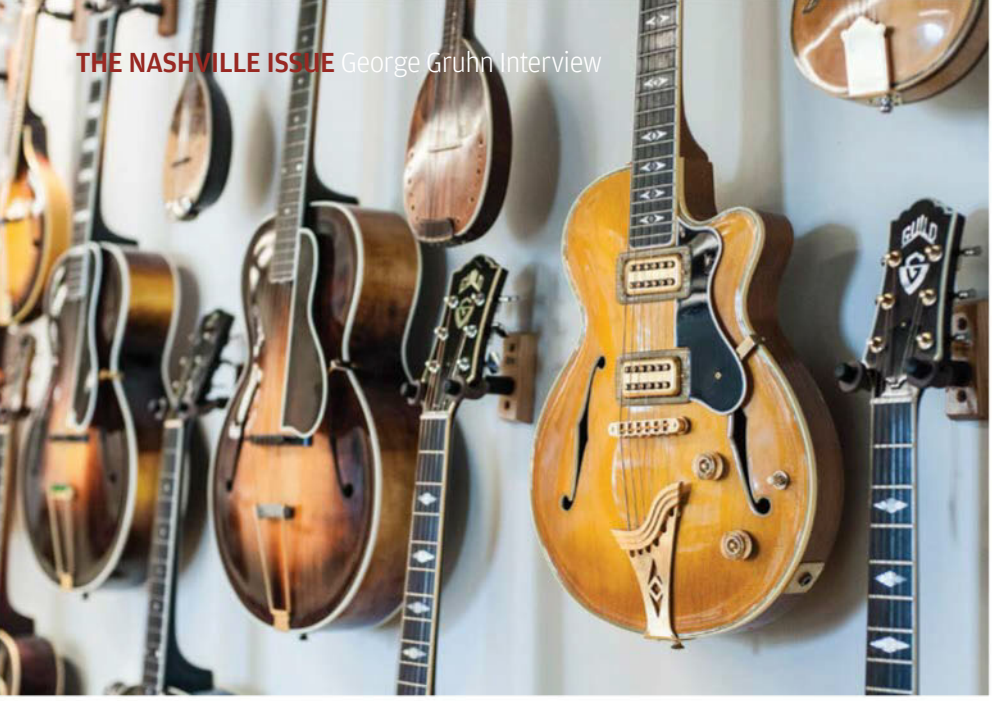
Later, while compiling the indispensible field guide, *Gruhn's Guide To Vintage Guitars* (released in 1991 and now in its third edition), Gruhn and co-author Walter Carter would model identification keys precisely after zoological equivalents, substituting fretted instruments for reptiles.

Gruhn Guitars is now housed in an 18,000 sq. ft building on 8th Avenue South

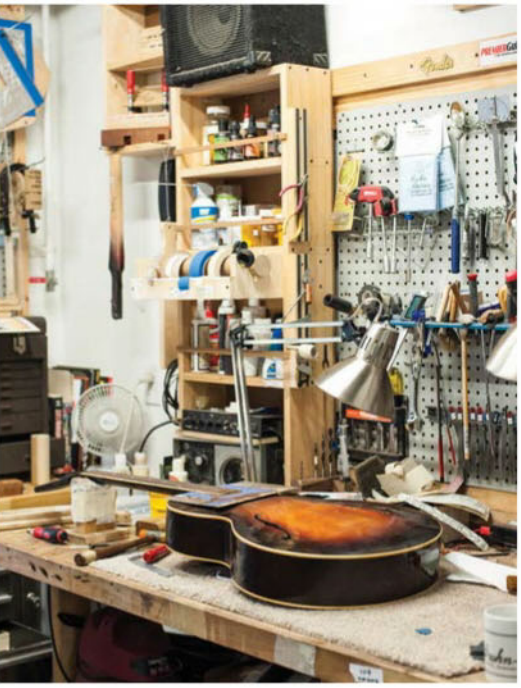
Back in the 1960s, Gruhn was "very actively wheeling and dealing guitars as a student," and he found that for every guitar he would uncover that he wanted to keep for himself, he would unearth as many as 50 to 100 instruments that were great deals that he simply couldn't pass up: "I could make money on them. It was idiotic to have discovered it and just leave it there when I knew I could sell it for three times as much. Also, after a while, it dawned on me that that's how I could afford to keep some.

"Mom and dad were willing to finance a guitar, one. But they weren't going to support a guitar habit! Especially since to this day my lifetime earnings playing music are $43 from '63 to the present. But I did learn about guitars very quickly back in the days when it was harder to do it. There were no books about guitars; there were books about how to play, but not vintage or used guitars. Things we take for granted, like the Martin serial number list on the back of my business card, you couldn't get that. You could write them a letter, giving them a serial number, and they'd look it up and write back to you."

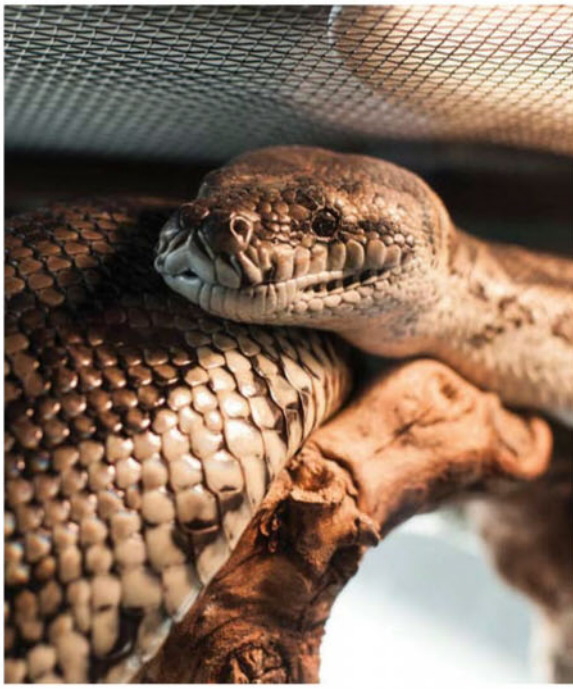
Martin's consecutive serial numbering system means that some simple arithmetic can tell you exactly how many instruments the company built each year, which in turn tells its own fascinating story about the state of the wider guitar industry at the time: "In 1972 they peaked at 22,637 guitars," recalls Gruhn. "In 1982 they made 3,153. By 1982 Martin and Gibson and Fender were in deep, deep shit. Martin made less guitars in 1982 than they did at the height of the depression..."



Guitars queued up and awaiting attention from Gruhn's luthiers



This 1960 Guild A-500 is a current Gruhn favourite



Luckily for the big American guitar companies, and Gruhn himself, in the mid-1980s a whole generation was about to start buying guitars again: "The baby boomers bought little red sports cars, tennis and racquetball equipment, guitars and other toys and they saved my ass along with saving Fender, Gibson, Martin and all the others. That would not have happened had antibiotics not been introduced in 1945, because there would have been no such thing as a midlife crisis!"

When it comes to the state of business in 2015, Gruhn is characteristically frank in his appraisal: "I'd starve to death if I had to rely on Nashville business! Fully 70 per cent of the business I do is out of state. A high percentage used to be out of the USA, a lot of it was export, but much less so now – one of the prime reasons being the CITES treaty, that made it into a nightmare to export legally. I'm too big to not do it legally! The risk is not just losing the instrument, but you can have literally hundreds of thousands of dollars of fines.

"If I were caught sending an instrument with Brazilian rosewood on an international shipment with no permit for it, they could really, really hurt me. I'm 70 and I have no intention of ever retiring as long as I'm physically and mentally able, but I don't want to spend my so-called golden years in government housing behind barbed wire! [Getting the documentation] is time consuming and expensive, but it can be done. It can cost anywhere from three to five hundred dollars and it can take anywhere from three to five months. A lot of people don't want to wait, so they may buy it from a small-time dealer or private party in the US, who will send it by mail. The chance of getting caught is a long way from zero, and if you're a bigger dealer and you are shipping a hundred instruments a month, the odds are not so good. The chance of being caught if you are carrying it as hand luggage is pretty small, but it exists.

"If it was harvested before the ban, it qualifies for a pre-CITES exemption certificate. But they make it so friggin' hard to get the certificate! I can get a certificate for Brazilian rosewood, but it can still take several months and for a cheap guitar it's not worth it. For a very high-dollar guitar it can be worth it. If you're dealing with Martin guitars, you have an additional CITES problem: ivory.

> "The baby boomers bought sports cars, guitars and other toys and saved my ass, along with Fender, Gibson and Martin"

One third of the floorspace of Gruhn's store is devoted to one of the best repair shops anywhere

Ivory is much more restricted than Brazilian rosewood. New York State, New Jersey and California ban even mammoth and mastodon ivory. If it's hard and white it's probably banned!

"Prior to 1918, if a Martin had white binding on the body it was ivory. Up until about 1917, nuts and saddles were ivory. We can legally take the ivory off and ship it with a bone saddle and a bone nut, but there's even a fight going on about interstate trade within the USA. NAMM negotiated with the US Fish & Wildlife Service and, at least for interstate, musical instruments can be exempt if they are pre-ban and have less than 200 grams of ivory. So on a big grand piano, it's pushing the limits. Some big organs with multiple keyboards, they don't pass. Travelling orchestras have had bows seized.

"The fact is that the market is messed up from CITES. But it's also a changed market. I spent much of my career trying to find instruments that were in pristine, original, clean condition. These days, if you are buying a new Custom Shop Fender, the New Old Stock Model costs less than the Closet Classic model with a little bit of wear, which costs less than the Relic model, which has quite a bit of fake wear, which costs less than the Masterbuilt model that they beat the shit out of! But if you buy a New Old Stock model and you play it with a big belt buckle, pick scratch it... it goes down in value because you scratched it! They scratch it, you pay them for it! It's a source of never-ending amusement to me. But the fact is that more and more I'm having to deal with a new generation of buyers. Baby boomers are aged beyond the active acquisition phase of their life cycle."

When it comes to buying advice, Gruhn refutes the notion that old automatically means good, and is a firm believer that instruments such as the 1952 Telecaster and 1959 Les Paul are iconic simply because they were extremely well made in the first place. "Frankly, I don't even like the term vintage as much as 'golden era'," he says. "Vintage just implies there is a particular age at which guitars are vintage and that's good. Whereas 'golden era' implies that for each company – and it may not be the same period for each company – there was a particular era when they really had everything come together right. Some of the best Martins made since I was born have been made recently. Are they better than 1937? No. Are they going to age to be as good as 1937? No."

Always the salesman, though he denies that any bona fide 'sleepers' exist in today's market, Gruhn refuses to let us leave without playing a lovely 1960 Guild A-500 archtop: "In terms of screaming deals, Guild is an overlooked brand. Some of the older Guilds are pretty damn good, pre-'67 in particular..."

Visit Gruhn Guitars at guitars.com to see the store's full inventory.

A Rare Vintage

Although it has been open only since June 2013, Carter Vintage Guitars has quickly become an essential port of call for guitarists passing through Music City. Lock up your credit cards and step inside...

Story **Chris Vinnicombe** | Photography **Eleanor Jane**

Opposite page
Christie and Walter Carter bring a combined 50 years of experience of fretted instruments to Carter Vintage

Just under a mile's stumble south from the likeable tourist trap bars on Broadway and a mere two minutes around the corner from Jack White's Third Man Records stands Carter Vintage. The store's 8th Avenue location marks the western boundary of a triangular slice of neighbourhood recently rebranded as Pie Town by its artsier inhabitants in an effort to shake off a somewhat unsavoury reputation. Huge exterior murals of Maybelle Carter and a sunburst Les Paul mean that you can't miss it, and there's much to savour when you grasp one half of the bisected Gibson SG body that functions as a pair of door handles and step into nearly 8,000 square feet of fretted instrument heaven.

Proprietors Christie and Walter Carter certainly know a thing or two about vintage guitars, mandolins and banjos. Christie worked at Gruhn Guitars for 25 years as both store manager and salesperson par excellence, while Walter's career has included stints as a country songwriter and Gibson's in-house historian and archivist. He also co-authored the indispensible reference title, *Gruhn's Guide To Vintage Guitars*. Christie and Walter went out on their own in late 2012 and worked from their home for a short time before buying 625 8th Avenue South and renovating it in a contemporary urban style before opening their doors to the public in June 2013.

"We started with 75 instruments spread out over all of the walls and virtually nothing sitting on the floor," remembers Walter. "Now it looks almost like hoarders live here! We've got over 1,300 instruments. We started out with just us and >

Carter Vintage

Carter Vintage
GUITARS
buy . sell . trade . appraise

"At one point we had four Dumbles on the stage there! They come in and they go out..."

The back of Keith Urban's Dumble Overdrive Special...

...and his Dumble Overdrive Deluxe

This tweed Twin was given a blackface makeover at the Fender factory

Above **Now might just be a good time to buy a vintage resonator**

one other employee and now we have 17, full- and part-time. We expected some growth but it's really taken us by surprise how quickly we've been accepted."

Famous frets

Because it's Nashville, some of that acceptance has come from celebrity clients, as evidenced by a pair of Dumble amplifiers owned by Keith Urban and a whole collection of Steve Earle's instruments currently available in store.

"Some we knew, some heard about us," says Walter of the Carters' famous customers. "Carlos Santana was driving by and saw Maybelle Carter on the outside wall. Other people have come from the other direction, seen a giant Gibson Les Paul and thought, 'That must be a guitar store!' But we knew people from previous dealings and others just heard about us.

"And we're fairly close to Downtown. If you're playing here in any of the Downtown venues it's an easy jump to take a break from soundcheck; we're the closest store now to Downtown. There used to be several stores Downtown but not anymore. We're probably a mile walk from all the honky-tonks, which gives the drunks a chance to walk it off by the time they get here. Most Americans won't walk it, they'll take a cab. Europeans and Australians will walk it!"

"We expected some growth but it's really taken us by surprise how quickly we've been accepted"

When asked how they deal with the temptation of being surrounded by hundreds of beautiful vintage guitars and whether there have been instruments that they have found impossible to let go, Walter laughs and points the finger at his other half: "She has an office full of instruments like that!"

"I grab a few things here and there," Christie admits. "Some neat stuff. I've picked up a few old, rare amps. A couple of Grammers [vintage Nashville-made acoustics manufactured in small numbers in the second half of the 1960s – Ed] came through recently that I really like, some tenors... I tend to hang on to stuff and he'll just sell 'em!"

"We haven't set anything aside that's super high-dollar," adds Walter, "Just some cool stuff."

On the subject of high dollars, we wonder how the Carters feel >

Marshall

about the state of the vintage guitar market and whether they think that its recovery from the global economic crisis of 2008 is now complete. "It was really 2009 that was the horrible year for vintage instruments," says Walter. "Then it hit a bottom, finally, and I think it's risen some since. It's not back to the crazy prices of 2007 and 2008, but everything seems to have recovered now.

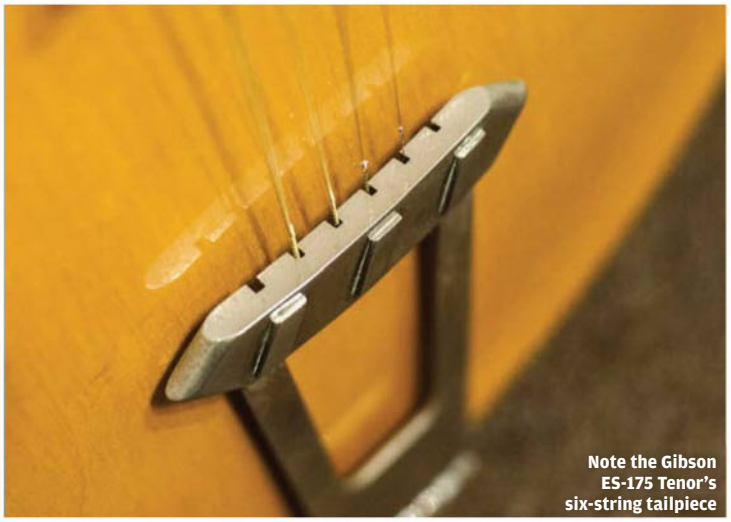
"Whenever that happens, the better pieces prove to be the stronger performers. The ES-335 is the strong model of that group. To some degree, the ES-345 and ES-355 tag along with it. When times are good, people pay crazy money for the ES-345 and ES-355 also. When times are tough, they want only the 335s. In the Les Paul family, the 1958-60 sunbursts remain stronger – maybe they didn't get hurt as much as prices for Customs, Specials and Juniors. Most things have come back."

"2009 was the horrible year for vintage. Everything seems to have recovered now"

Ironically, one of the only areas in which Walter feels the market is a little flat is the demand for archtop instruments, because "they never really recovered from the boom that they experienced in the late 1990s, when there were two collectors that were buying against each other and pushing prices up. One of them died and one of them almost went to jail and had his collection >

Above **An all-original 1953 Telecaster and a 1958 Strat formerly owned by Waylon Jennings and Tony Joe White**

A super-rare 1957 ES-175 Tenor guitar



Note the Gibson ES-175 Tenor's six-string tailpiece

A killer early 1960 Gibson TV Special

Above **1960 D'Angelico and 1975 D'Aquisto New Yorkers**

Below **1916 Dyer harp guitar**

liquidated. The market fell some when they were removed, then it fell with everything else and has never recovered. There's not as great a demand, it seems, for archtops."

Perhaps surprisingly, Walter also cites National resonators and 1930s Dobros as another segment of the market that is no longer buoyant: "In the case of Dobros, they used to be coveted but most people want a more modern design. And as for the steel-bodied Nationals, it's partly that the new National company makes guitars that intonate a little better, and just in general that market is about the same as it was in the mid-nineties.

"Everything else seems to have rebounded. The market is not soaring again the way it was. Things are strong. After having lost money, people want to make sure they're investing more wisely and that their investment is a solid investment and not a speculative one."

Player power

We wonder if the current climate makes it a good time for those who are looking to acquire a player's guitar rather than invest in a collector's piece to dip their toe into the vintage market. "It's hard to make a blanket statement," says Walter when we ask if there are any bargains out there. "Maybe a later version of something, if you've played it and it's good. Not all of the seventies Les Pauls are bad.

"If you really want a bargain, find something with a broken neck. That's where the bargain is"

"If you really want a bargain, find something with a broken neck. The price should be as low as half of what it normally would be. If the neck's been repaired properly it's stronger than it ever was.

"If you're just looking for something to play, that's where the bargain is. Or repaired cracks, especially in acoustics. The refret doesn't hurt the value as much as it used to; you've gotta refret it if you're gonna play it. Look for something with issues that doesn't affect the playability. You can get it for even less than half price if somebody has really messed up the finish on it!"

Finally, given Carter Vintage's close proximity to Jack White's Third Man Records store and >

Note the original mute at the bridge

A cool pair of custom colour offsets: a 1965 Jaguar and 1963 Bass VI

recording studio, we have to ask about the resurgence in catalogue brands such as Airline and Harmony in recent years, thanks in no small part to the likes of White and Dan Auerbach getting edgy garage blues fuzztones from old electrics that once might have been found in a pawnshop rather than a vintage guitar boutique.

"There's certainly a market," says Walter. "The cool, kitschy factor from the fifties and sixties makes a $300 guitar a $1,200 guitar if it looks neat. They still have to play, and sometimes that's a challenge because the neck is probably loose or, worse, not fixable. And the more gaudy and the more switches and knobs, the better it is!"

Visit www.cartervintage.com to see Christie and Walter Carter's current inventory of vintage instruments and in-store video demos and performances featuring the likes of JD Simo, Guthrie Trapp, Steve Earle and many more great players.

Photo by Jordan Curtis Hughes

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Remaking history

Gibson's Nashville Custom Shop produces some of the most desirable electric guitars on the planet. We venture inside to find out why the company thinks its new True Historic series guitars are the best Les Paul reissues it has ever produced

Story **Chris Vinnicombe** | Photography **Eleanor Jane**

Above **Gibson Custom True Historic Les Paul bodies glued, stacked up and waiting to become musical instruments**

A little over a year ago, Gibson Custom revealed its new True Historic series at the Winter NAMM show in Anaheim, California. With admission prices starting at £4,999 for the Goldtops and '58 Bursts and rising to eight grand for a '59 with heavy ageing treatment, we're in the realms of the serious, insatiable Les Paul addict here, for whom even a recent R9 doesn't get close enough to a fifties original. To find out whether these really are Gibson's most faithful Les Paul reissues to date or if everyone at the company has inhaled a few too many nitrocellulose fumes, we head to the Gibson Custom factory on Elm Hill Pike on the east side of the city. First, Gibson Custom's Historic program manager Edwin Wilson talks us through the manufacturing process, then we take one of the guitars home and put it through its paces...

Wood shop

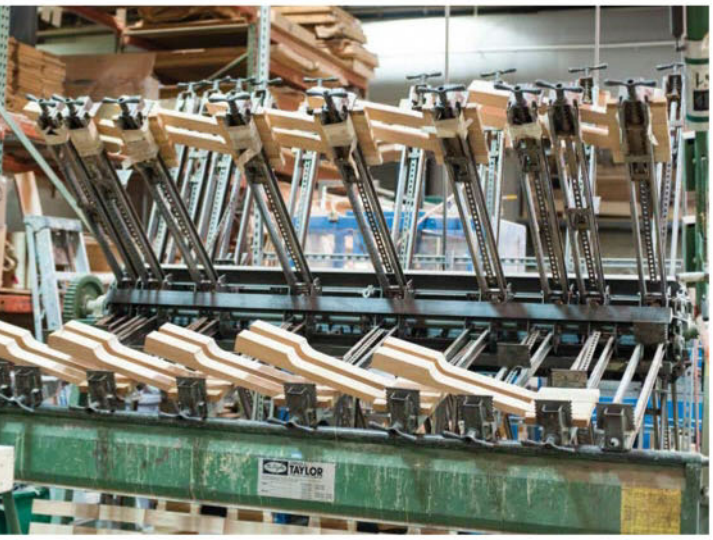
EW: "When I'm buying maple, there are specific tops that I know that I want on True Historic Les Pauls. They're absolutely amazing, so I'll mark them, and when they come in, our designation for the reissue tops is R9, but the special tops will have my initials on the side also. Goldtops are plain most of the time. There might be a little something in it. On some of the aged Goldtops we did this year, they were really curly tops underneath. When Tom [Murphy] aged the guitars, I wanted to see some flame coming through, like on some of the originals.

"Our main criteria for mahogany is the size: it's gotta be a one-piece body. And then, the weight. We >

KOMO

R9
R9
R9
R9
R9
R9
R9(EW)
R9
R9
B-EW

LPC


TAYLOR

don't have criteria for the grain because we want to buy one-piece bodies. For the most part, I want straight grain and I want it more quartersawn-looking. I have a guy who matches the bodies and the necks so that the mahogany back takes the filler and the aniline dye colour as much like the neck as possible. The necks are all quarter-sawn mahogany. We ask the wood vendor to rotate the neck so that we get the longest section of grain right through here [the headstock transition] so that it'll have the most support here, which is what Gibson did in the fifties."

Glue

EW: "We're using hide glue to glue the tops onto the mahogany backs, the neck to the body and the fingerboard to the neck. It has sound benefits, as well as making the guitar more historically accurate. Glues dry at different hardnesses. Titebond [used on regular Custom Shop instruments] dries very good and very hard, but it doesn't dry as hard or glass-like as hide glue does. When hide glue dries it's very strong and brittle, and it transfers the vibrations better."

Carving

EW: "With True Historics, we changed the process. Now, on the True Historics, Historic Select, Collectors Choice and Artist Model guitars, they'll go through and get the first carve. The body will go face down, they'll rout the back, they'll do the rout for the toggle switch, then they'll flip it over, and it rotates on the fixture, then they'll do the initial rout for the neck, then they'll do the rout for the binding and the cutaway, then they'll do the carving.

"Our main criteria for mahogany is the size: it's gotta be a one-piece body. Then the weight"

The carving is based on 3D-scanned data that we've taken from original guitars. In the fifties, it's all over the place! When we get an original guitar, what we're measuring is something that's been machined, sanded, finished, everything. What we would really need would be one that's carved with nothing else done to it. That doesn't exist. So when we approach it, we're scanning a guitar that's already had all this done, and we're trying to recreate that shape as closely as possible.

"They'll do the first process all the way up to the carve, then it'll go over to our binding department, they'll go rout it for the rest of the binding, they'll bind the guitar then it'll come back. Then it has the second carving process. We've eliminated the slack belt operation for this, because regardless of how good a slack belter is, they have an almost impossible job. They have two things they have to accomplish: number one is to get all of the carving marks from the cutters off the body. Number two is, they have to maintain that original carve shape. When it's the machine doing it, we can compensate for that.

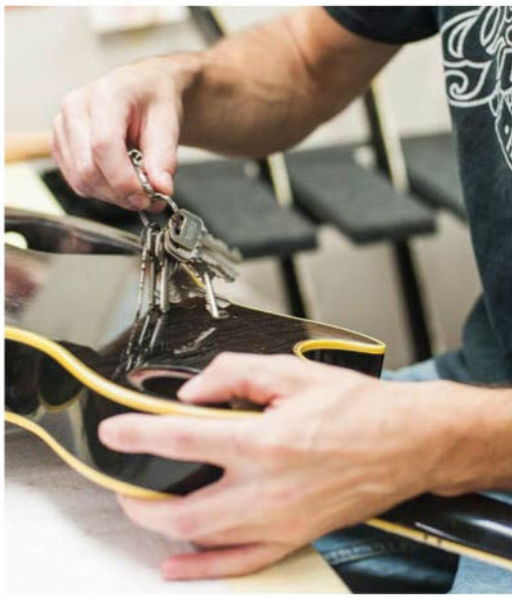
"It's not a reflection on any individual, but when Gibson was making guitars [in the 1950s] you're talking about a section of the United States where the main industry in that area was furniture, so you had woodworkers there. When a woodworker went to get a job at a guitar factory, he was a woodworker; he didn't come from McDonald's! The people that come to work at Gibson these days are typically younger and they have to learn the skills. Our customer will go, 'yeah I understand all that, but I want the top like this'. This is how we get you the top like this."

Fretwire

EW: "On original Les Pauls, the fretwire started out very narrow, >

Above **"When I first started here, the glue was a powder, and they mixed it with acetone, and you could get 15 feet away from the department and it would just about knock you out! It's a very high-skilled job and one of the hardest jobs in the whole production process, without a doubt."**

Left **Gibson Custom's Historic program manager Edwin Wilson walks us through the True Historic production process, from hand-selected timber to final tweaks**



Above **From aniline dye application to hand-ageing with keys and razor blades, every part of the True Historic process is painstaking**

medium height, then it went bigger. The original fretwire on '59s was about 0.046-0.050" tall and 0.094-0.096" wide. For many years, that's the size that we used on reissues. But on True Historic, we changed the height. The one thing that you notice on every old guitar that comes in that hasn't had jumbo frets put in over the binding is that the frets have been dressed down; they're somewhere between 0.033" and 0.036" tall, the width is still there, but when you feel the guitar and you play the guitar, the binding is rolled and all that and you don't feel the fret ends on the guitar. Now we start out with 0.036"-tall fretwire, then the guitars get Plekked and they get finished out, so some of them are 0.034", some are 0.036".

"In 1999, Eric Johnson called and he wanted a Les Paul Custom, with very specific details. I'm working on the guitar and he called and said, 'I have my own fretwire that I want to use'. I'd never really had a long conversation about fretwire with anybody like that! But he was explaining to me about this company that he had found. Their annealing process for the metal was like they used to do in the old days. So we tried some of their fretwire and it really was a different animal. We changed from that company because they were really small and they were going to go out of business. We used Jescar for a very long time. This year, we've changed to another company, but both use the same process and formula that this first company did."

The finish

EW: "After the True Historics get sanded they'll get filled. Our aniline dye is powder, and they'll mix it with the regular filler and paint it on. It's not just for the red, we've used it on the Goldtops this year for the brown. Between reds and browns, we've got about 10 different colours that we use. Colour is one of the most difficult things for us to deal with because we can't use the lacquer that they did in the fifties, we can't use the chemicals they did in the fifties, everything's illegal! So we have to figure out a way around that. In the fifties, it looked like whatever it looked like. They weren't trying to accomplish anything at all. They didn't care what it was going to look like in 50 years' time, they were thinking about Friday and they were thinking about retirement. I guarantee that if someone went into Gibson at that time and said, 'these guitars are going to be the most awesome guitars in the world', they would have said, 'whatever! No they're not! We're not even going to be here in 10 years!'.

"After it gets all the base coats on it, they'll sand it out and level the finish, then it'll get the top coats. The aniline dye doesn't lie on the surface, it actually floats into the different layers of lacquer, so when you sand it, it becomes airborne again. There's a brief time when that red really migrates out of the mahogany and into the lacquer. Normally, everything sits on the guitar in layers. But if you take the finish off of an old guitar, when you pull some of the clear off, you

see red in there, you see all of the colour in there as it all migrates up into it. If you do that with True Historics, it's the same. The idea of getting colour on the guitar without adding material onto the guitar is huge for the overall sound of the guitar and how it rings. With this process, you're getting the colour with something that doesn't have that thickness to it, and whatever lacquer you put on is only to protect it.

"It's still nitrocellulose, but it's a different formula that dries a lot harder and a little slower. The average thickness of a Gibson finish is about 13 mil [thousandths of an inch] thick. On True Historic, the spec is 5 mil. The finish is thin on old guitars, usually 5-6 mil. We want the finish like on an old guitar but also, for the sound, the approach needs to be more like we're building an acoustic. The purpose is to make the guitar as it would have left Gibson – it would have been a shiny guitar but not a glossy guitar."

The ageing process

EW: "When you get a Fender aged guitar and you look at the finish, a lot of the time it just looks like cracked ice. That's a chemical process that they use; they buy a specific type of lacquer called airplane lacquer that dries very, very hard, then they will shoot keyboard cleaner or something on it, and they'll make it shatter. For us, since the very beginning, when we first started ageing guitars, we want the guitars to look like an old Gibson guitar. It's not just a matter of making a guitar look beat-up.

"In the very beginning, when Tom [Murphy] started ageing guitars, he developed a process. All of the lines are done one at a time, by razor, by hand. Gibson used many different lacquer manufacturers. You can look at guitars from different eras and you can see how they wear, how they check, what the finish looks like. If we're doing a guitar from the seventies, we would not do a bunch of tighter loops like on a fifties guitar, that's not what the finish is going to do.

"If you order a True Historic guitar that's aged, it's 1959, Gibson's making guitars, you want a Les Paul? You get what you get! If you wanted specific ageing on a guitar, you would order a Historic Select, because it's the exact same guitar as True Historic, except for you have the option of colour and ageing pattern."

Plastics

EW: "For several years, I've tried to get a lot of things changed, and for 2015 it just worked out that I was able to do it. There's a vendor that I work with, he makes a lot of hardware for us already, bridges and tailpieces. This guy's really into what he's doing, and he has a long history with Gibson. So I got ready to do these parts and I got in touch with a friend of mine, Lou Gatanas, who is the parts guy in the US, a big vintage dealer out of New York. I bought some pieces off him, and he loaned me some because an original set of cream plastics is about $35,000! Which is very insane.

"We want the guitars to look like an old Gibson. It's not just a matter of making a guitar look beat-up"

"I wanted to get the flat pieces done – jack plate, poker chip, pickguard – and the mounting rings, pickup covers, the knobs and the toggle cap. I just wanted the exact same thing that happened in the fifties, which I knew would be challenging. So the first thing that we worked on was the pickup covers. I got original covers and we changed the thickness of the material, you can see the difference in the radiuses. It's not just the shape that the machine stamps the cover, it's the buffing and the sanding that happens after that is what creates the radiuses on the corners.

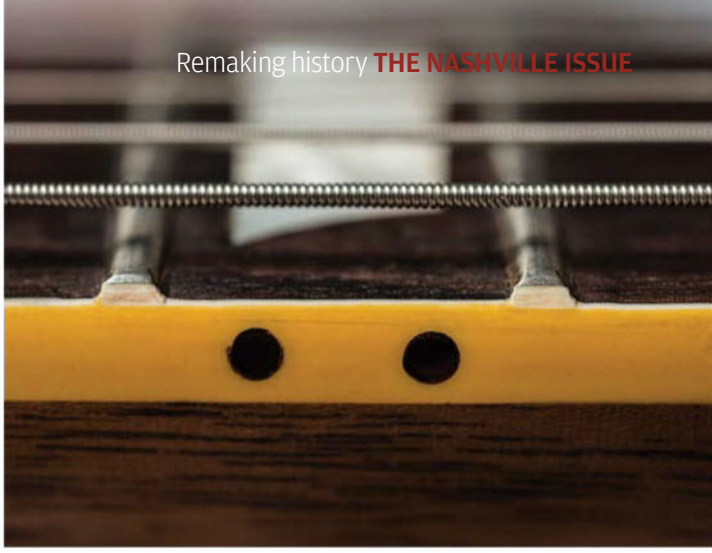
"The mounting rings are made out of butyrate, same as the bobbins and same as the knobs, so the rings are a different shape, the stand-offs are a different shape, it's got the M69 in there with part of the M missing because the ring that we had, that's the way that it was. It was a '59 ring. Some of the earlier rings, you see the M on there, but others you don't. It's just a function of the tool wearing. The Jack plate and the toggle switch washer are punched parts now, they don't machine them, so you see some of the flashing on them, and the pickguard is machined out and it's got the saw marks on the outside.

"Dead Mint Club and all these other guys that make plastics, they use a single layer of butyrate or whatever it is, their focus is on just the colour. Our focus is on picking up production of those parts on where it left off. The colour that I used was actually on the pickguard underneath the bracket. Under the pickguard, where it hadn't seen sunlight or anything, it was still the original colour. I want our stuff to tarnish and look like an old guitar does in several years. The other thing about the pickguard and the flat plastics is that it's all laminated acrylic, so the pickguard is six-ply, the jack plate is four-ply and the poker chip is three-ply.

"The shape of the knobs is different, but also it's got the dimple on the top. So the low point is in the middle of the knob, then it comes out and there's a ridge, that's the high point, and then it drops back down to the outside edge. All of that is a function of how hot the tool is that is injecting the part, how long it sits in that tool before they can take it out, so it's the cooling process. And all of those things were things we would never have thought about, ever. But that's why there's so much variation on original parts. Then on our knobs they paint the numbers in by hand, they wipe it out, and the gold is the exact same gold we use on our Goldtops, all painted by hand. We changed the font, we changed the slash marks to make the slash marks right – we went through a lot of work!

"The toggle caps are Catalin, which is the original material, and we had a difficult time finding someone to get it right. But we sent them out to a couple of different labs and had the materials tested. I want to be able to tell you definitively, 'this is this material', because we bought knobs, we sent them out to independent labs, we had them tested.

"When we do it, we're Gibson, we created it. It has value. Some guy might get $600 a set for rings, the next guy might get $800 for all the other parts... all that's fine and >



dandy, but when you put all that stuff on your guitar and try to sell it, you're not going to be able to take a $5,000 guitar and get $8-9,000 for it just because it's got these parts on it that a group of people perceive as being right. It's not going to happen."

Our verdict

In order to attempt to make sense of the the sum of all these parts, back in the UK we took delivery of a True Historic 1956 Les Paul Goldtop. At £4,999, it's very far from cheap but in this Burst-free, non-aged guise it's the most affordable way in to the series.

Straight out of the case and into the pressure cooker of a studio session with a singer-songwriter, the True Historic excelled. Using the bridge pickup for both standard tuning slide lines and biting lead saw the guitar scythe through a busy backing track of acoustic guitar, electric piano, drums, bass and big Gretsch rhythm chords with spring reverb and tremolo.

There's something genuinely special about a good P-90 Gibson, and this guitar has it in spades – at the bridge with a touch of tweedy crunch the alnico III P-90s deliver one of the ultimate rock 'n' roll sounds, spitting out Live At Leeds, Keith Richards, classic Britpop and southern-rock boogie, while flipping to the neck or twin-pickup setting gives you a wonderfully fluid, vocal lead tone for anything from Green to Gilmour.

Compared to recent R6 models we've spent time with, it's hard not to agree with Edwin that the small changes have added up to a guitar with a less inhibited, more dynamic and more open voice. The palm-filling neck shape – 21mm deep at the first fret and 24mm deep at fret 12 – is tremendously comfortable, the factory set-up is perfect, and the lightly-rolled binding has nicely kickstarted a process that will only improve the way this already wonderful instrument feels as the years roll by.

Compared to an original? It's impossible to beat a well-worn old Goldtop when it comes to emotive and difficult-to-measure areas such as sheer vibe and desirability, but on a real-world level the True Historic's wider fretwire makes it a little easier to play, for sure, and it certainly doesn't sound £15-20,000 worse. At 8.5lbs, the TH is also lighter than any of the five or six original 1950s Goldtops we've played, all of which have comfortably exceeded 9lbs.

The most obsessive Les Paul enthusiasts will still argue that Brazilian rosewood is the only truly authentic material for a 1950s Les Paul fingerboard, but given the complexities of purchasing enough certified wood in the quantity required for even a limited production run, the up-charge would almost certainly send the already eye-watering price into orbit – Gibson is a very different ball game to man-in-shed who builds a couple of guitars a month!

The True Historic project has been a labour of love for Edwin Wilson, and the resulting Les Pauls are the best and most desirable that Gibson has produced since its golden era. How the bloody hell we'll scrape together the cash for one remains anybody's guess...

Above **Detail is everything, but it comes at a price. Edwin Wilson reveals that the cost of the gold control knobs alone has risen from around five cents per unit to "over six bucks a knob. It's a big difference, especially when you are trying to convince the company to do something like that!"**

Rolling the binding is another job that's done by hand: "We don't have the machine set up to do that, but we have someone who is awesome at doing it!"

SOUNDTRACK OF MY LIFE

Hugh Cornwell

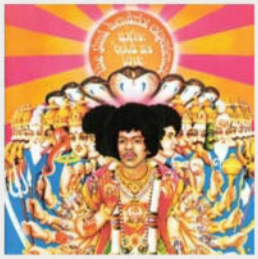
Former Stranglers frontman and prolific solo artist talks us through the records closest to his heart

London-born Hugh Cornwell made his name as the guitarist, vocalist and primary songwriter in The Stranglers, joining in 1974 and spending 16 years with the band before establishing himself as a highly respected solo songwriter. Cornwell released 10 albums and 21 Top 40 singles with The Stranglers. Among the best-known songs he wrote are *Peaches, Golden Brown, No More Heroes* and *Nice N Sleazy*. He left the band in 1990 and has enjoyed a fruitful solo career, with his most recent studio album being 2012's *Totem And Taboo*.
Cornwell's compilation album, The Fall And Rise Of Hugh Cornwell, and The Anthology DVD are available now. For more details, go to www.hughcornwell.com

Soft Machine
THE SOFT MACHINE

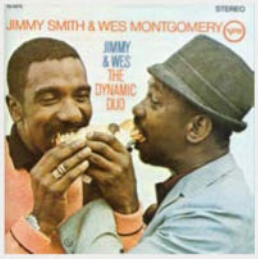
"My favourite rock album of all time is Soft Machine's first album, with the great Kevin Ayers on bass. You must remember I started off as a bass player at school. This is a remarkable piece of work, as all the songs blend into each other. It must have been amazing to see live. Just a trio with no guitar player, but Mike Ratledge plays his keyboards like a guitar."

Jimi Hendrix
AXIS: BOLD AS LOVE



"*Axis: Bold As Love* is full of brilliant songs and it's an album that has Jimi on fine form. They recorded this album at night whilst on a really heavy touring schedule in about a week. It's just a remarkable piece of work. The arrangements are absolutely fantastic, and it just shows what you can achieve by keeping things simple."

Jimmy & Wes
THE DYNAMIC DUO



"I've always been a really big fan of Wes Montgomery's playing. He completely mastered the use of playing the octaves. On *The Dynamic Duo*, it's complemented by Jimmy Smith's awesome organ parts. Their playing together is a marriage made in heaven. My favourite track on the album is *13 Death March*."

Love
DA CAPO

"This is the relatively unknown second Love album. Love released two albums in 1966. This has the searing *Seven & Seven Is* on side one, and *Revelation* on side two shows you just what kind of a guitar player Arthur Lee was. Quirky, edgy, unexpected, frenetic, exciting, odd. Quite adventurous to put a sprawling jam over the whole of the second side!"

The Doors
THE DOORS

"Pick any Doors album and it will illustrate how great a guitarist Robbie Krieger is. What many people don't realise is he wrote a lot of the signature Doors songs before Jimbo had even read the words. He couldn't sing like Jim, but his writing contribution is vastly overlooked. His style of playing is extremely eclectic and distinct. Angry, disturbed, psychedelic..."

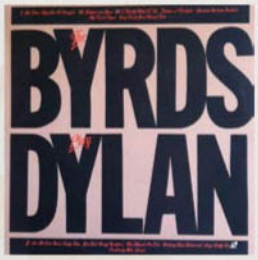
Ramones
RAMONES

"The Ramones' first album has to be up there as one of the most disturbing debuts to come out. That vamping guitar had never been done before, so Johnny Ramone was groundbreaking. 29 minutes and four seconds of pure energy. I remember being played it by my manager in his office on a Saturday morning in East Putney and thinking the world had changed."

Elvis Presley
ELVIS' GOLDEN RECORDS

"Scotty Moore was, of course, Elvis Presley's guitarist, and he comes from Gadsden, Tennessee. Scotty is a mighty fine player, and his playing is all over Elvis' records right from the very beginning. He's 83 years old and I sincerely hope that he's still playing now."

The Byrds
THE BYRDS PLAY DYLAN



"This first appeared in Japan. A great combination – a standout songwriter teamed with a beautiful blend of voices and guitars, five of them! You could never dream that Dylan songs could sound so wonderful. It encapsulates the psychedelic revolution. Radical ideas in a chocolate box."

Jack Bruce
SILVER RAILS

"Finally, I'd like to pay tribute to my favourite bass player, the late Jack Bruce. This is his last album, which was released posthumously. I used to go dig Jack and Ginger when I was a teenager down at The Marquee, when they were the rhythm section of The Graham Bond Organisation."

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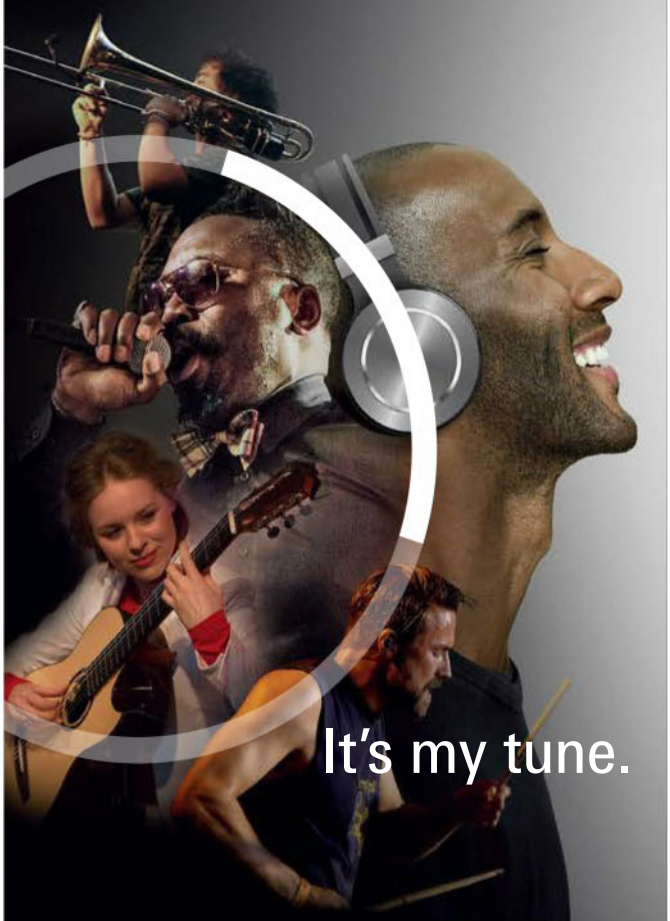

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Guitar & Bass LEGENDS

BRAD WHITFORD

45 years after joining Aerosmith, a bona fide living guitar legend talks to *G&B* about Les Pauls, Strats and Teles and playing alongside Perry, Page and Bonamassa...

Story **Michael Heatley**

The Aerosmith juggernaut just keeps a-rollin'. Back in September 2015, Boston's finest played a huge free outdoor show in Moscow's Lubyanka Square, adding an impressive luggage label to the Blue Army tour that took them to 15 US cities last summer. After rocking the nearby KGB headquarters to their foundations, they also left us with a double CD and DVD set of their 2014 Donington headline show to remember them by in years to come.

Brad Whitford, Joe Perry's guitar partner and the last member of the classic line-up to join the ranks, some 45 years ago, admits that was a special gig, even by Aerosmith standards. "It was at Donington, and that's always historically such a big deal for us. We play so many shows that are considered premier rock events around the world and, yeah it was very cool to be asked to come and play at Donington. It's always special."

Back in 1990, Jimmy Page lent his presence to Aerosmith's show at the same venue. "That was absolutely awesome," smiles Brad, recalling the memory of playing alongside the Zeppelin legend. Page or no Page, Aerosmith hit the Donington stage once again in 2014 with their powerhouse rendition of Yardbirds favourite *Train Kept A-Rollin'* – and Whitford proudly admits that he "always will have a deep appreciation for the Yardbirds and Zeppelin; the heavy approach to rock guitar has always had a place in my heart. We like to think we still carry that torch and hopefully turn somebody [on to it]..."

The song has been part of the Aerosmith repertoire for so long now that it's become indelibly associated with them in newer fans' minds – a fact that gives Brad cause to chuckle. "I remember years ago playing with Jeff Beck in Chicago, and in the middle of Jeff's show he played about 30 seconds, maybe a minute, of the *Train Kept A Rollin'* lick. A young person came up to me and said, 'Hey that was so cool – Jeff played your song!' No, no, no, that's not quite right! Jeff was maybe giving a little nod to us, but I had to explain to him that it was the other way round and actually Jeff – and Jimmy – gave that to us..."

Talking of players of white Strats, one of the first images buyers of the new DVD will see is Brad backstage on just such an instrument – part of his warm-up routine? "Oh yeah! I spend a lot of time just practising, and the white Strat is a favourite from my collection. I typically sit there and play that for as long as I can before a show. I want to get out there and be very warmed up, be ready to deliver for the band and the audience."

Donington, he reveals, didn't inspire any special butterflies in the pit of his stomach. "Maybe more of just an anxious feeling, but I don't really have any stage fright," he says. The last time he suffered was when Aerosmith were inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2001. "Everybody was sitting out there, including Jeff and Jimmy and all these amazing musicians. They gave us our award and then we went on to play

Brad (second from right) with the rest of Aerosmith circa 2015

Ross Halfin

some music. Walking over and picking up my guitar, for some reason I became incredibly nervous about performing in front of those guys because they're my heroes. But otherwise no, I'm just ready and anxious to get out there and start doing it."

The Hall of Fame, Donington and the Russian gig were high-profile shows by any yardstick – in marked contrast to Brad's live debut with Aerosmith after replacing original member Ray Tabano. "My first time onstage with the band, it must have been 1971, was in a very small club up in Vermont, called the Savage Beast. I don't remember too much more about it but, gosh, it was a long time ago!"

Many people, including this writer, had assumed Whitford was there from the very beginning alongside Perry, Steven Tyler and the rhythm duo of bassist Tom Hamilton and drummer Joey Kramer. "Well, I almost was!" he protests. "The band had not even been together a year and a couple of the guys were not happy with Ray's commitment, I guess, and his performance. I think they were looking around.

"I was playing in another band... I didn't know Joe or anyone in Aerosmith and I was surprised when they came to see my band play. We got to meet each other after the show, we started talking and a few days later Joe called and said 'Hey, let's get together!' That was kinda the start of that, and before I knew it, 'OK, would you like to come play with us?'"

> "I like good old-fashioned tools. They nailed it in the 50s. Open my toolbox and that's what you'll find – a Les Paul, Strat and Tele"

Whitford was playing a Les Paul back then, and his preference for classic Gibson and Fender designs has remained constant over the intervening four decades. "For the most part, I like the good old-fashioned tools. They nailed it back in the 50s when they designed and built these guitars, and I don't think they've ever improved on it. Open my toolbox and that's what you'll find – a Les Paul, Strat and Tele..."

When it comes to matching the guitar to the song, "there's a couple of elements that we consider. Sometimes it's a sonic thing depending on what Joe's playing... two Les Pauls can get a little muddy, things like that. A lot of times it's what I think the song's telling me. Other times, I refer back to the original recording."

Whitford occupies a unique position in the band. Not only is he the fulcrum between the rhythm section and the frontline, but his six-string interplay with Perry is as much a musical trademark of Aerosmith as vocalist Tyler's drawled delivery. So what's the secret of a lasting guitar partnership?

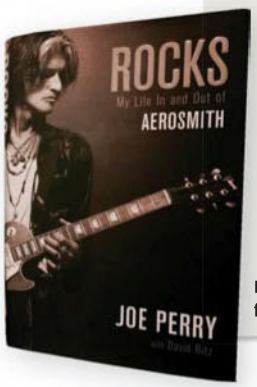
"Well, it was really Joe's initiative to get me in the band," defers Whitford. "We had chemistry right from the start. I think Joe saw that in my approach to playing and we've always had a natural, organic communication. I suppose it's just kinda matured over the years but we still have that, we still have that chemistry and great admiration for each other's approach. I can't think of anybody I'd rather be playing with..."

That said, Whitford forsook his usual partner three years ago and appeared on Joe Bonamassa's *Driving Towards The Daylight* album – an experience he found fulfilling. "It was very different from working with >

NO NAME, NO SHAME?

So what is the more likely – a Brad Whitford signature guitar or a book, like Steven and Joe's? "Probably neither!" Brad giggles at the cheeky question. "I get asked a lot about [designing] guitars, but I don't know how to improve on my favourite instruments, like the Les Paul and Stratocaster. I think about an interview with Jeff Beck when he was asked a very similar question. He had the same response: 'No, I wouldn't do it. I think the ultimate guitar was built back in 1954, the Strat, and there's no way to improve on that; it's already been done'. I get approached about doing that a lot, but I'm not going to do it just to cash in – that doesn't do anything for me."

As for an autobiography or an Aerosmith history book, he's happy to leave the printed word to his bandmates. "My favourite was the last one, Joe Perry's book. I thought it was the best of the bunch – much more accurate and, I thought, much more romantic, actually. I don't see the necessity to tell that story again from my angle; I don't think that'll happen."



Ross Halfin

PLAYING AWAY

Back in 1981, during a three-year sabbatical, Whitford linked up with ex-Ted Nugent vocalist Derek St. Holmes. They cut one long-player before Aerosmith detoxed and re-formed. Now 2015 will see a second Whitford/St. Holmes album. "We're working on that and having a lot of fun with it. We have a really great band and we managed to get an absolutely amazing drummer, Troy Luccketta from Tesla. We'd been working on this thing for a while, but it didn't really come together until Troy showed up for rehearsal one day on a recommendation from some friends of ours. He sat down and immediately understood what we were doing – so much so that we only had two rehearsals with him. The next thing we knew, we were in the studio cutting nine tracks in two days! So he was the missing ingredient."

The band, completed by bassist Chopper Anderson and playing Stateside dates in November, gives Brad licence to express his heavier side. "I write a lot of music," he explains, "and a lot of it I don't think is Aerosmith music... so it's a place for me to really let my creative juices flow. Derek and I have always found it easy to come together and create; it's a very good chemistry, so it's a really creative outlet for me.

"Not that it gets boring playing Aerosmith songs over and over again – they're great songs – but you always want to stay on your toes. You need to be challenged, and for me the best way is to constantly try to create something new that you haven't done before. That brings better energy for me to take back to Aerosmith; it makes me well rounded as a player and a person."

Aerosmith. We tend to take forever to get things done, whereas working with Joe [Bonamassa] was a much more disciplined approach, which I love. I like to work fast, I like to be in the studio and I like to be challenged, and that's one of the fun things about working with Joe. He's become a great friend – and a real influence."

But is Brad's guitar collection as big as his new pal's? "Oh God, no way, no way! You get a new guitar, send him a picture of it and the next thing you know he'll send me pictures back showing me four versions of what I just bought. He's very good at one-upmanship [laughs]. He has such an amazing collection of stuff, and all of us are fascinated by the depth of his knowledge of vintage gear and his collection. You go to his house and it's like a museum, it's just incredible.

"Right now, I probably have around 100 guitars I've collected over the years. Most of them are things I'm never gonna pick up again. They become like trading tools, so I can go out and find better instruments. I do a lot of trading." Whitford doesn't take vintage guitars on the road, preferring Custom Shop Les Pauls and Strats; chambered Gibsons are specially favoured for their lighter weight. He has "probably about eight or nine guitars" to hand on tour, "to cover all the bases in case anything goes wrong. I have a main Les Paul and probably about three or four spares, then a backup for the Strat, a backup for the Tele. I used to carry probably twice that, closer to 20 guitars, but it became silly; I thought 'I don't need all those...'"

As for his current live rig, "It's all pretty straight ahead. I play these amps called 3 Monkeys; it's a company my guitar tech actually started, and I've been using those quite extensively. Basically, they're not much different from Marshall, like so many other boutique amps, but I love them; I'm able to get the sounds I want to get. At Donington, I had three different 3 Monkeys amps. Each will do something different sonically, harmonically. Put two or three together and it just gets bigger – a bigger, more harmonically rich sound."

The half-dozen or so cabinets you see behind Whitford on stage are not all on, and this reflects one great improvement when it comes to outdoor gigs today. "I'm using in-ear monitoring," he says, "so I have a very clear picture of the whole band. It's not a question of volume, it's more a question of sound... you don't want to have six, eight cabinets blaring away!"

And how does Perry figure in Whitford's in-ear mix? "I do a kind of stereo thing where I have Joe in my left ear and I'm more on the right and a little more in the centre of the mix. I have my guitar louder because I like to hear what's going on with the strings. The rest is just a stereo mix of the rest of the band."

> "The Stones are setting the example to us; they're still out there going strong. They're not going to sit at home on the couch"

The press tend to describe Whitford as the band's 'rhythm guitarist' – yet solos on *Jaded* and *Mama Kin*, to name but two live highlights, expose that label as downright misleading. Ask him if he ever gets annoyed with this and he exhales deeply. "Ooooh, noooooo." A pause for effect, then he continues. "The only time it would bother me was when someone who was not really familiar with the band might not know who was playing what... Joe has always been labelled lead guitar and myself rhythm.

"I remember when *Melody Maker* reviewed our album *Rocks*. They absolutely loved this song *Last Child*, and they said 'wow, it sounded like Jeff Beck playing'. They credited it to Joe, and it was all me! That made me angry, but it doesn't bother me anymore. People who are fans of the band and the people that know, they know what's going on, so no, it doesn't bother me. It's a duo-guitar thing, that's what it is – but yeah, [I'm] not [upset] anymore..."

With everyone in the band now into their seventh decade, how long would Brad like Aerosmith to carry on? "I don't know, I really don't know," he answers. "I still feel like we have a lot of music in us, and I think we'll go until we can't [laughs]!

"We don't do anything else! We make music, that's what we do. We love it, everybody is in pretty good shape and we'll keep doing it until something happens that keeps us from doing it. The Stones are setting the example to us; they're still out there going strong. We've always looked up to those guys, we're such huge fans. They're not going to sit at home on the couch; they're going out and doing what they do."

As for his own band's DVD, Brad is "very pleased with just the fact that were still able to do this 40 years later. It's pretty miraculous, I think – and with all the original members. That doesn't happen for just anybody."

From Boston to Moscow via Donington – the train keeps a-rollin'...

LISTEN UP

AEROSMITH
Toys In The Attic
(1975)
Sweet Emotion, *Walk This Way*... eight million record buyers made this the band's breakthrough long-player in 1975.

AEROSMITH
Rocks
(1976)
Their fourth album has, to many ears, never been bettered. Includes the Whitford-Tyler co-write *Last Child*.

AEROSMITH
Donington 2014
(2014)
The brand new audio-visual showcase that gives a 20-song sonic V-sign to Old Father Time – and then some!

AND ANOTHER THING... In 2009 Brad missed the start of Aerosmith's tour with ZZ Top after banging his head on the door frame of his Ferrari...

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Friendly Fire

Danny Bryant's new album is full of smoking solos both from himself and his special guests. As **MARK ALEXANDER** finds out, it's also a lifetime's ambition fulfilled...

Danny Bryant is buzzing. The 35-year-old rocker has fashioned his own brand of gritty, no-nonsense blues that has earned him a reputation for delivering fiery chops and double-stop bends. On the cover of his latest album he clutches a Gibson Firebird, a guitar he has always coveted, and an upcoming tour will take him on another jaunt around the country. But that's not what's got Bryant fired up.

The *Blood Money* album follows his *Temperature Rising* and *Hurricane* titles, which earned the English guitarist tours of Europe and the USA and a spot at London's BluesFest at the Royal Albert Hall. A professional musician for nearly half of his life, Bryant takes live performances in his stride, but what truly floated his boat was playing with seasoned bluesman Walter Trout.

"He's been like a second father to me. We've known each other for 20 years. He's been my mentor," says Bryant discussing their collaboration on the album's title track. "We were going to write a song together but it never came about. I had started *Blood Money* but had always seen it as duet for us. I wrote it in his style and with him in mind. Scheduling meant I was in England and he was in LA making his own album, so through the wonders of modern technology I laid down my part, the file was sent over to him and he put down his part and then it was sent back as a completed track."

The long-distance collaboration was made more poignant as Bryant first met the former John Lee Hooker and John Mayall sideman when he was just 13. It's not an exaggeration to say Trout was his idol. "His influence is evident in everything I do," says Bryant. "It's been so many years that it's hard to pick out what that is, but it is certainly in the phrasing, in the tone and the way I attack the notes.

"We all have different influences and we all tie them together so that what links an Eric Clapton lick to a Freddie King lick becomes you. It's hard to deconstruct it. It becomes the fabric of what you are. In the end, you don't

remember where you got a lick from – you just know you borrowed it from somewhere."

Like the rest of the album, the title track simmers with a distinctive swagger. It also has the unmistakable focus and resolve that Trout brings to his playing, and which Bryant has adopted. The fact that Trout almost died from liver disease in 2014 and Bryant fronted his band in the US while he was recovering only serves to illustrate the bond between the two and the significance of the track.

The other notable guest on the album is the ex-Whitesnake axeman Bernie Marsden, who appears on *Just Won't Burn*. "I came to him from a blues standpoint, rather than through Whitesnake," says Bryant. "We've played on the same bills at festivals and spent an hour or two chatting, but I was hesitant to ask him to play on the album because he is such a lovely guy, but he was really enthusiastic."

He shouldn't have worried. Not only did Marsden pitch up with his scorching licks, he also brought along his famous Les Paul – The Beast. "We weren't going to record with it, although he ended up using it on one take. The width of sound was just incredible. It's an amazing sounding guitar. It's the Holy Grail because it's a '59 Les Paul. To be honest, I thought it couldn't be as good as people say it is, but it really is. He's a lucky man."

Of course, Bryant has his own stash of tasty six-strings. One of his latest additions is a 2013 Gibson Firebird that appears on the front cover of the new album. "I bought it in America last year," he says. "I'd never had a Firebird but had always wanted one. I fell in love with it instantly; I love the tone and feel of it. It's become one of my main guitars."

On stage, Bryant typically dons his signature model Fret-King Corona DBR, a double-cutaway Corona body made of three-piece American alder coupled to a maple neck with 22 medium jumbo frets. The unusual pickup configuration includes a slanted neck humbucker which is, in fact, a pair of Fret-King single coils combined, while the bridge-mounted Fret-King P-90 is stacked.

> "Walter's been like a second father to me. We've known each other 20 years. He's been my mentor"

The guitar came about when Bryant met up with long-term friend and founder of Fret-King Trev Wilkinson. "He wanted to build me a guitar and asked what I was after," says Bryant. "I said I wanted something like the guitar he had already given me, which was a Corona. That became my main guitar and he built me a back-up and that was the basis for the signature model."

Released in 2014, the signature model's humbucker and P-90 are routed through a vari-coil control, allowing Bryant to dial in a range of tones. "It's not on or off," he explains. "You can blend it. The second tone control is the vari-coil, which gradually winds down; so at 10, it's the full P-90 and at zero it's a true single coil. It's clever. I don't know how they do it, but I know I like the sound."

Danny live with his Fret-King signature guitar

With all this onboard trickery, you would be forgiven for thinking Bryant is partial to a packed pedalboard. "I don't use any overdrive pedals," he says. "My set-up is simple. I have a tuning pedal and sometimes a wah. The guys in the band wind me up about it. I got to a soundcheck one night and they had placed three tuning pedals in a row. I do it the old-fashioned way and get the gain out of the amp and blend the tones by adjusting the volume and tones on the guitar. All the guys who influenced me did that. When I'm playing chords I back the volume off, which cleans up the tone naturally, and when I want to let rip, I turn it up. With Strat-style guitars or even a Les Paul, they don't sound their best flat-out. You want the volume on seven or eight."

Recently, Bryant has tweaked the final element in his set-up by replacing his trusty 100-watt Marshall head with Blackstar's HT Club 50. He now endorses the Northampton-based firm, using the 50 for leads and a 100-watt Artisan for rhythm work.

"They contacted me while I was in America," he recalls. "I was aware of them, but I had never tried any of their amps, so they sent one to the first show of last year's UK tour and I loved it. Before, I used 100-watt Marshall heads, but I did a couple of flyers where I used 50-watts and found they were a lot sweeter in the midrange, so I asked for a 50-watt head. They sent me a couple of HT Club 50s, and they were just great. I used them on the album along with a 100-watt Artisan. I still own the Marshalls and I still love them."

In closing, Bryant acknowledges that *Blood Money* realises a lifelong ambition. "I've wanted to make this album ever since I began my musical journey 20 years ago," he says. Job done.

LISTEN UP

DANNY BRYANT
Blood Money
(2015)
Full of superlative guitar playing and with guest appearances from Trout and Marsden, this could be a career highlight.

DANNY BRYANT
Temperature Rising
(2014)
Bryant's fastest-selling album and to many ears his best. Described by this very magazine as "a blues-rock gem".

DANNY BRYANT
Just As I Am
(2010)
This breakthrough album is a blend of classic rock and blues. The title track is the standout moment here.

AND ANOTHER THING... *Temperature Rising* spent six weeks at number one in the blues download chart in 2014, ahead of releases from Joe Bonamassa and Johnny Winter

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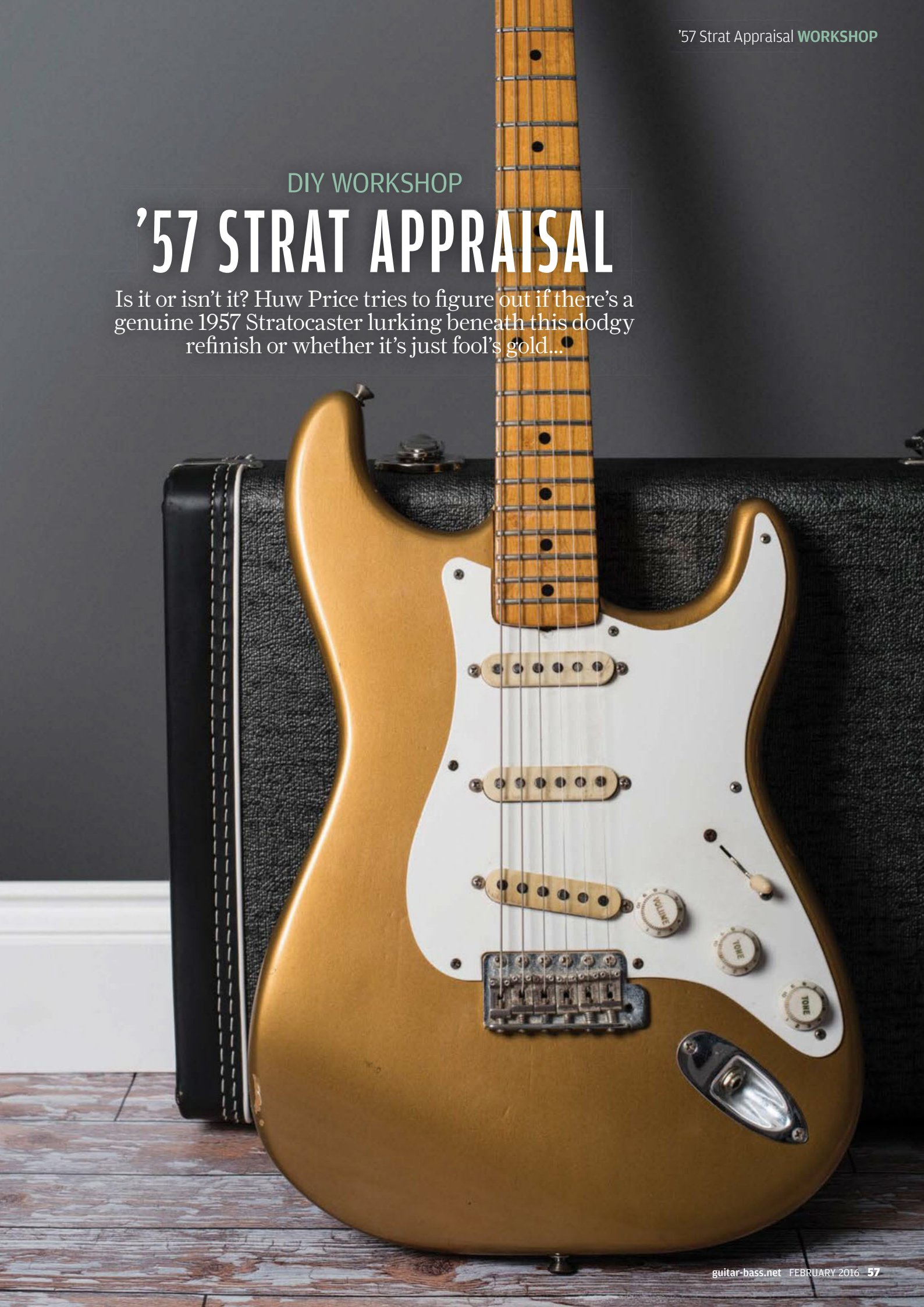
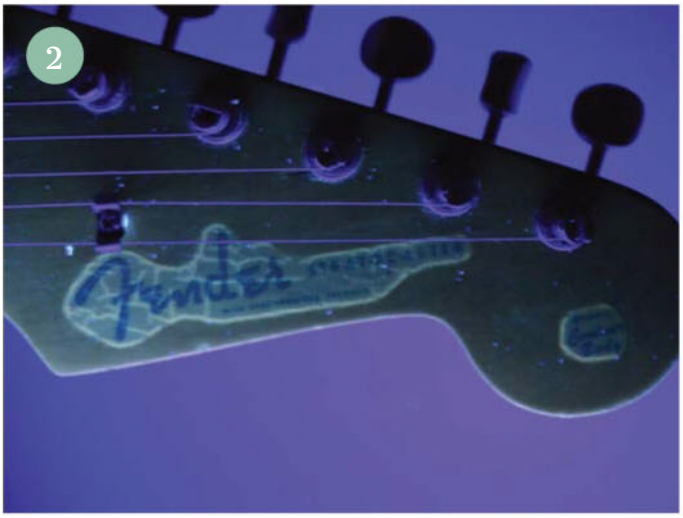
DIY WORKSHOP

'57 STRAT APPRAISAL

Is it or isn't it? Huw Price tries to figure out if there's a genuine 1957 Stratocaster lurking beneath this dodgy refinish or whether it's just fool's gold...





1 The '57 Strat aka Goldie (right) alongside a '56 example provided by Vintage Guitar Boutique (vintageguitarboutique.com)

2 The black light reveals older lacquer beneath the two decals and it looks as if somebody sanded up to the edges to preserve the decal before spraying over them. Unfortunately, small differences between this decal and that of the '56 suggest Goldie's is non-original

3 It's a lot easier to fake a pencil date on the end of the neck than the later stamped dates Fender used. This date looks a bit large, but we did find other examples with similar writing. The jury is out on this

4 The codes match on the tone pots and confirm that both were made by Stackpole in the fourth week of 1957

When I was a kid, vintage Stratocasters were invariably loaded with retrofit pickups and tuners, locking trems and brass hardware. You were far more likely to see dark brown varnish than a Fender factory finish but although they weren't commonplace, you did see them about. Nowadays, hacked-up vintage Strats rarely surface, and I often wonder where they all ended up. It seems most likely that some have been restored and are being passed off as all-original, while others have been disassembled to sell off the parts.

This gold Stratocaster is one of those 'modified' examples, and it was sold to a client as a 1957. Shortly after buying it, he sent it over to get a second opinion. To help out, Vintage Guitar Boutique kindly lent us a virtually bone stock '56 example, and what follows is a step-by-step appraisal to determine the provenance of the guitar I'm calling Goldie.

First impressions

I'll admit that my heart sank when I encountered Goldie in its non-original case, but then I noticed how light it is. The scales show a mere 7.1lbs, and even by vintage Strat standards that's pretty featherweight. Acoustically, the tone is loud, unusually chimey, superbly defined and has the effortless 'freed up' quality of a thoroughbred.

This unplugged tone is absolutely what I'd associate with a really good vintage Strat. I've heard plenty of Custom Shop Fenders, JV reissues and even 80s Tokais that sound very similar; however, few – if any – sound as good as Goldie does through an amp. Although it doesn't look like much, it certainly feels and sounds like the real deal.

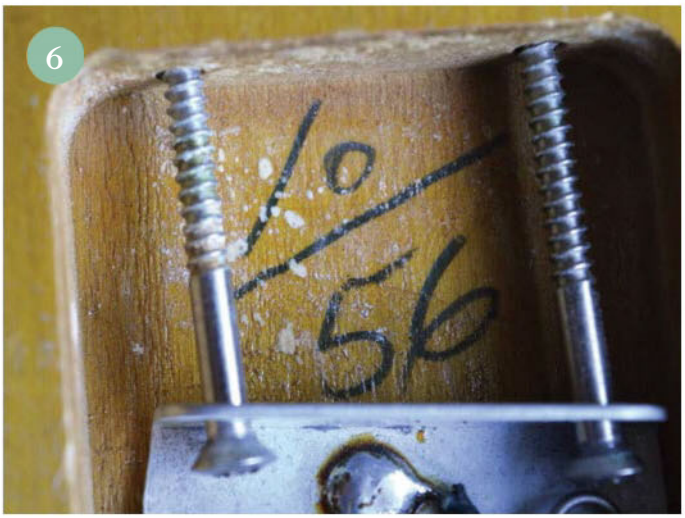
Black light

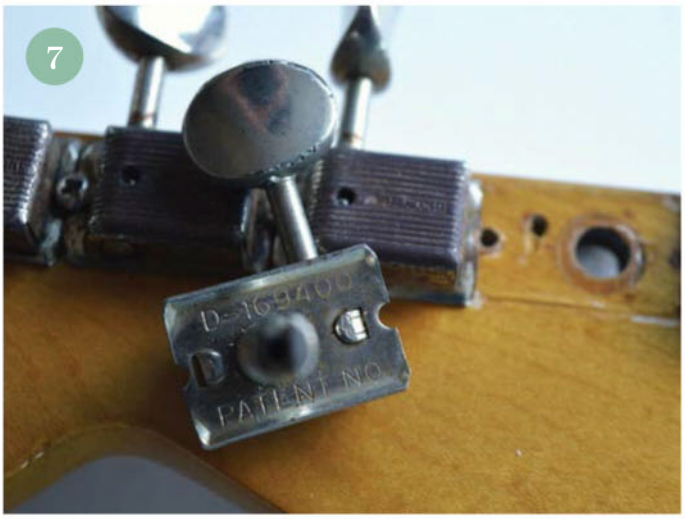
Before stripping everything down, I tested Goldie under black light 2. Although black lighting cannot provide definitive proof that a part is original or even vintage, it can certainly reveal anything that's fairly recent because it won't fluoresce. The pickguard, tone knobs, switch tip and pickup covers glowed nicely, but the body didn't glow at all and the neck glowed only in places.

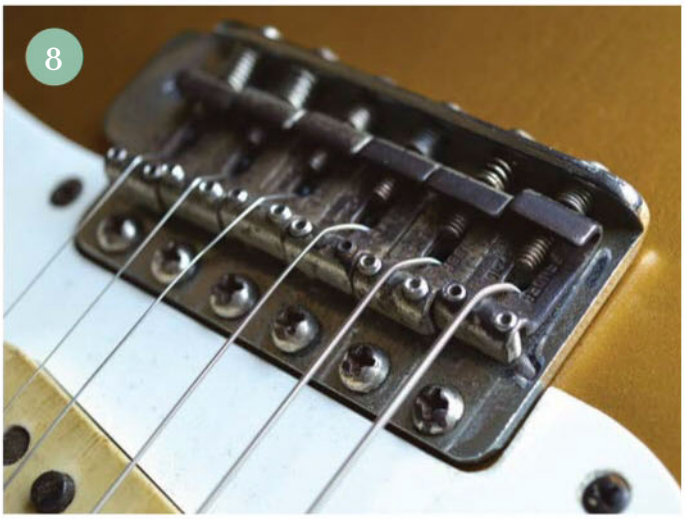
There's clearly old finish under the decal and in areas on the back of the neck where the overspray finish transitions into bare wood. This prompted me to test the body and neck finishes in hidden areas using acetone on a cotton bud. Neither finish wiped away with the acetone, so in addition to being non-original, they are not even nitrocellulose.

Date markings

On vintage Strats, there are up to four areas that can give you specific date information. The most obvious starting place is the serial number







on the neck plate. Goldie's 20*** serial number begins with a minus sign, just like Clapton's Blackie (-20036), and corresponds with 1957 according to various online sources and reference books.

Except for a brief hiatus in early '59, Fender marked the end of every neck with a pencil date, up until March 1962. Goldie's neck date reads 3/57 and, considering the neck has been refinished, it's a nice surprise to find anything there at all 3. The best was yet to come, as whoever did the body refinish took the trouble to mask off the area under the spring claw, protecting the pencil marks. This time, it reads 10/56 and the yellow background reveals that Goldie's body originally had a Sunburst finish.

Lastly, I check the control potentiometers. Goldie's volume pot is a modern replacement, but the other two are old Stackpoles. US potentiometer manufacturers routinely stamped manufacturer and date codes onto their pot casings, and both of Goldie's tone pots date to the fourth week of 1957 4.

So the pots are indisputably old, correspond with the serial number and fall in between the pencil dates. The pencil marks themselves could have been added by anybody at any time, so I searched online for some other 1957 neck dates to compare the handwriting.

It took a while, but I eventually found two necks with dates that looked similar to Goldie's. Comparing the Sunburst's body date with Goldie's, they look so similar that searching out other examples seemed unnecessary 5 & 6.

Tuners

Up until 1956, Kluson tuners had no lettering on the rear casing. From 1956 until 1964, you see 'single line' tuners with the word 'deluxe' stamped along the centre. This changed to a double line 'Kluson deluxe' stamp in 1964. You can usually distinguish reproduction tuners because the casing is deeper and you can see a nylon bushing.

Goldie arrived with six vintage single line Klusons, but one has a broken shaft and it clearly came from another set because the casing is less rusty. All six carry 'Patent No' stamps under the baseplates, which places them in a 1958-1964 time window 7. So, if Goldie did leave the Fullerton factory in 1957, it could not have done so with this set of tuners attached – and the bushes didn't look right at all.

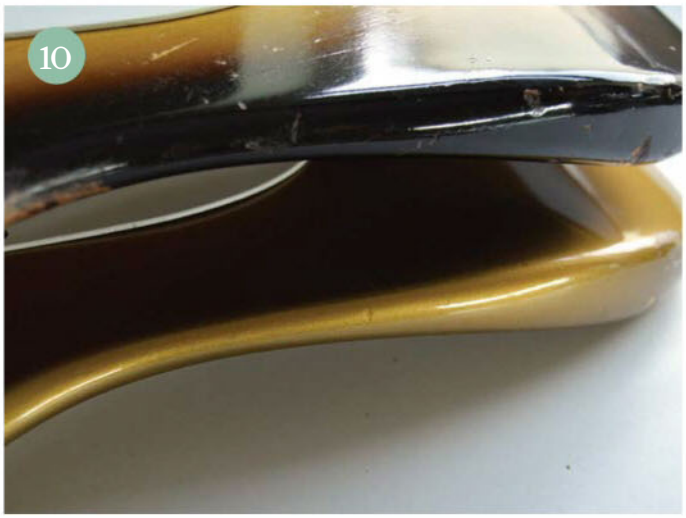
Bridge

The saddles are heavily corroded and stamped 'Fender Pat. Pend' either side of the string slots. About half of the height adjustment screws look to be replacements and the intonation screws have obviously seen a lot of screwdriver >

5 & 6 Finding 10/56 body dates on both guitars was a remarkable coincidence, and whoever sprayed the gold finish can be commended for protecting this original feature

7 The patent number stamp under this Kluson tuner reveals that it was made between 1958 and 1964. So they're vintage but non-original

8 The edges of the bridge plate have rough-casting marks and the saddles have the correct stamps. We're pretty certain it's vintage Fender equipment



9 & 10 Strat bodies from this era tend to have almost exaggerated contours. Although Goldie's body has lost some of its thickness, the two bodies look almost entirely identical

11 If you know where to look, you can often spot dowels in the body – two on the front and two on the back. These were used to fill holes left by the router jig fixings, and on the back they should be 13 7/8" apart

12 Over-sanding the fretboard has exposed the top of the walnut truss-rod plug. These were located very close to the surface and the walnut can often be seen in the nut slot

action. A couple have even been sawn to allow adjustment with a flathead screwdriver after the crosshead slots had been stripped out. If these saddles are fakes, then they're the best I've seen by a considerable margin 8.

I always look for rough edges and casting marks on bridge plates because the repros tend to be smooth. You can test whether or not the trem block is steel by checking if a magnet will stick to it, and you can test if a US-spec trem arm with an imperial thread will screw in properly. The ball end recesses should be fairly shallow, too.

Lastly, I looked at the spring claw. It measures two inches across and appears identical in every way to the one in the borrowed '56. The ground wire solder joint also seems original and intact. So Goldie's bridge parts appear to pass every vintage test but, again, that doesn't mean they all date from 1957.

Body

Even with refinished bodies, there are clues you can look for. I struck lucky with the pencil date, and it was by sheer good luck that the body of the borrowed '56 was made in October too. Areas of exposed wood look a lot more like alder than ash and this is exactly what I'd hope to see on a late '56 body.

The contours on both '56 bodies appear exaggerated compared to earlier and later examples but are typical of the period. The tummy tuck is elongated and more extreme and the top chamfer comes down to such a fine edge, you could almost cut yourself on it 9 & 10!

The routs of both bodies have identical measurements and the positioning of the strap button on the upper horn is also interesting to note because during this era they were attached a little further round, pointed downwards towards the neck. Fender's routing jigs would leave holes in the body front and rear. These were filled with dowels, but they are often visible because the finish would sink into them over time. Despite the refinish, the rear dowel holes are easy to spot through the gold finish and they are precisely 13 7/8" apart on both bodies 11.

With the pickguard removed, the routs appear intact but there are some worrying indications that the wood has been filled in the area below the neck and middle pickups. There are all the correct router marks, the cable channel was routed freehand with the typical fuzzy edges and there are a couple of dimples in the finish that correspond to the positions Fender used for spacer nails.

I feel some trepidation about what's under the finish, but based on the contouring, the exact locations of the jig holes and the shape of the routs, I conclude that the body is genuine. Unless it's an elaborate double bluff, but

why would anybody go to so much trouble to recreate a perfect late '56 shape, then fake ill-advised 1970s-style modifications, over-sanding and a flawless pencil date before spraying the body with poly finish in a shade of gold that isn't even vintage-correct?

Neck

The neck causes the greatest concern. The soft V feels just right, but there is a lack of front-to-back depth. The top of the walnut plug is exposed in the area behind Goldie's nut, but on the borrowed '56 there's about 1/16" to spare 12. My guess is that depth was lost when someone sanded the fingerboard prior to the neck refinish – presumably in an attempt to eradicate the finger marks that are commonly found on 50s maple necks and simulated on modern relics.

The close proximity of the side dots to the fingerboard edges supports the over-sanding theory, and whoever did the work would have needed to sand quite deep to get beyond the finger marks. The upshot is that Goldie's neck has lost about a millimetre in depth all the way along, and depth measurements taken from the '56 neck seem to confirm this.

There's little or no finish on the back of the neck, but it looks and feels vintage, and it's fortunate that it was left alone when the neck was resprayed. The new finish was applied poorly, especially over the fingerboard, appearing lumpy and uneven. At least the medium jumbo frets make Goldie really nice to play.

There's more bad news at the headstock, which is 1/16" thinner than usual near the low E tuner and tapers by another 1/32" at the top E tuner 13. Measurements show that thickness was lost from the rear of the headstock rather than the front; it seems that wooden plugs have been inserted in the post holes at some point. Presumably depth was lost when the plugs were sanded flush, but since there's no evidence of tuners other than Klusons ever having been fitted to Goldie, why this was done remains a mystery.

The router jig holes are present, adjacent to the D string tuner and in the area between the body fixing screws. The straight underside of the headstock profile and the tiny teardrop walnut plug are also consistent with a '56-'57 timeframe. Earlier and later vintage Strats always seem to have an elongated plug shape – as do the reissues. Even the unusual decal placement is remarkably similar on both Strats. It looks as if somebody carefully sanded up to the edge of Goldie's original decal before blowing new finish over the top.

Lastly, I tried swapping the truss-rod adjuster with one from a '63 Strat. Were the neck Far Eastern in origin, an adjuster with an imperial thread would not fit. My conclusion is that the neck has been much molested but it's probably original.

Electrics

Unlike many modern reproduction units, Goldie's pickups sound as vintage as they look. There is some evidence of a repair to the neck pickup and the cover doesn't push down completely over the middle pickup. This indicates the flats may have flared out during a rewind, and this is confirmed when the covers are removed. The wire is

13 More over-sanding on the back of the headstock has reduced its thickness. You can see how the tuner posts extend further from their bushings – Goldie's headstock is the one on top

14 Both pickups look very old, but we think the middle pickup has been rewound. The magnet wire has a lighter, more coppery appearance and although it sounds good, the neck and bridge sound better

15 Goldie appears to be carrying two vintage tone knobs, but the volume knob is Far Eastern. The pickup covers and switch tip glow under black light and the moulding marks look right for a pre-CBS Strat

16 & **17** The pickguards on both guitars appear identical under both natural and black light and the markings around the edges are very similar

darker and redder on the neck and bridge pickups and both sound better than the middle unit 14.

The neck pickup lead-out wires have been extended, and it seems unlikely that anybody would choose to do that, were this a recently-made replica. All three read close to 5.8k ohms with a multimeter and the magnetic polarity is north. It's another good sign; Fender reversed the polarity of the slugs to south in 1960. Besides the replaced volume pot mentioned earlier, there's a modern five-way switch and tone capacitor. The cloth wiring is a mix of old and new.

Plastics

The typeface on the volume knob and the absence of spokes indicates that it is Far Eastern and, since it is clearly quite old, probably Japanese. The tone knobs both have three spokes, the correct typeface and a yellowed patina that is consistent with the way ABS plastic often ages. The pickup covers and switch tip glow under black light, and have the correct mould marks for Fender parts of this era.

The rear spring cover's edges are very rounded and it doesn't look quite right, plus the screw holes are spaced differently to those on the '56. In contrast, the pickguard appears legitimate, with slight warping on the bass side. Markings on the sides of the pickguard suggest the guards were manufactured in the same way, with the same 1/16" thickness and without the straight sides and square corners of modern reproductions 16 & 17.

Verdict

It's hard to keep emotions in check during a project like this because one would always hope for the guitar to be genuine. Sometimes you have to go with your gut feeling. With that caveat, my conclusion is that Goldie has many pre-CBS parts, but it's impossible to say if they all left the Fender factory on the same day. Besides some suspect 'woodwork' that may be revealed once the finish is removed and the ill-advised neck reshaping, it appears to be the real deal.

By any standards, this is an outstanding-sounding Strat and despite the neck vandalism, it plays like a dream. It's sad that Goldie is worth more as a collection of parts than it is as a complete guitar, but the plan is to restore it regardless. I'm looking forward to performing the work and covering the process in forthcoming issues of *G&B*.

NEXT MONTH...

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PRS SE 277 SEMI-HOLLOW SOAPBAR £795
ELECTRIC GUITAR

Guitar & Bass AWARD CHOICE 9/10

PRS SE 277 Semi-Hollow Soapbar

Not just for metalheads, this affordable baritone from PRS is far from a one-trick pony. **CHRIS VINNICOMBE** saddles up...

Although PRS has built baritones in its Stevensville, Maryland facility for several artists on its roster, 2008's Korean-made SE Mike Mushok signature model was the company's first production instrument of this type. Staind guitarist Mushok's thick sound typifies what many casual observers most readily associate with the baritone guitar, but the reality is that these instruments can be used for much more than just heavy rock – think *Wichita Lineman* or the *Twin Peaks* theme for starters. With the Mushok model having run its course, Doug Shive, the head honcho of PRS's SE division, decided that it was time for an update to bring the brand's baritone offering into line with the rest of the SE stable.

Thus, the SE Series is now graced with a pair of 277 baritone models named after their 27.7-inch scale length: a humbucker-loaded solidbody and this Semi-Hollow version with soapbar pickups. Aesthetically, the Semi sports the classic PRS combo of flamed maple, sunburst finish and bird inlays but that attractive flame is a veneer atop a plainer section of timber. Savings generated by construction methods such as this in the SE line allow PRS – via the World Musical Instrument factory in Korea – to deliver an overall level of fit and finish that remains extraordinarily good for the money. Despite arriving with fairly hefty 14-68-gauge strings, the Wide Fat neck shape makes this an easy, stable player and the physical acclimatisation period is so brief as to be virtually non-existent. Shive explains the rationale: "A scale length in the 27- to 28-inch range works best [for baritones]. The familiar B-to-B tuning works well and is easy for a guitar player to make the switch."

The pickups have been chosen carefully, too: "Lower-output pickups are important so that it doesn't sound muddy," says Doug. "When we sent baritones to artists in the past, we would often wire the humbuckers with a coil tap and the default setting was single-coil."

In use

For the uninitiated, it's not as simple as assuming that a baritone guitar sits between a regular electric and a bass in a band mix. Judicious use of EQ is your friend, and it allows you to cover ground that both of those instruments would ordinarily inhabit. Grab a looper pedal and try using the neck pickup to lay down a bassline on the low B string – right-hand damping helps create a bass-like thud. Once you've flipped to the bridge pickup and added some chords over the top, you might find that engaging a wah and leaving it in the toe-down position creates a biting lead tone that cuts through perfectly. Into heavy spring reverb, this is also a great 60s-style, biting lead sound. By now, you've already done a pretty convincing impression of a full band – minus drums – with just one instrument and a couple of stompboxes.

When you turn up the drive, the middle pickup selector position is hum-cancelling, but neither pickup in isolation is too unruly. High gain and high volume equal hum but not undesirable microphonic feedback. In B or Drop A, the P-90s lend themselves towards the mid-rich throb of QOTSA and grainier Deftones textures rather than full-on contemporary metal crunch, but there are more than enough extended-range instruments on the market designed to do the latter. Indeed, in a heavy two-guitar band, the Soapbar would make an interesting sonic foil for the other guitarist's humbucker-loaded instrument.

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE... The **Squier Vintage Modified Bass VI £330** has a wonderful retro growl for everything from surf to *White Album*-era Beatles, to The Cure. **Hagstrom**'s **Viking Deluxe Baritone Semi Hollow £679** is another versatile, retro option.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Excellent build quality for the money
+ Comfortable neck shape
+ Soapbar pickups retain definition in lower registers

– We'd like to have seen a vibrato bridge for those surfy moments

The bite of P-90s, combined with a little additional air from the semi-solid construction, makes this a hugely versatile proposition for everything from retro twang to modern alt-rock

9/10

KEY FEATURES

PRS SE 277 Semi-Hollow Soapbar

- **PRICE** £795 (including gigbag)
- **DESCRIPTION** Semi-hollow, double-cutaway electric baritone, made in Korea
- **BUILD** Chambered mahogany body with maple top and flame maple veneer. Set maple neck with 10"/254mm radius rosewood fmingerboard, bird inlays and 22 medium jumbo frets
- **HARDWARE** Nickel string-through-body Plate-Style bridge, sealed tuners
- **ELECTRICS** 2x PRS SE Soapbar pickups, master volume, master tone, three-way toggle pickup selector switch
- **SCALE LENGTH** 27.7"/703.5mm
- **NECK WIDTH** 43mm at nut, 53mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 18.5mm at first fret, 20mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 35.5mm at nut, 53mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 7.5lbs/3.4kg
- **LEFT-HANDERS** No
- **FINISHES** Vintage Sunburst (as reviewed), Gray Black
- **CONTACT** PRS Europe 01223 874301 **www.prsguitars.com**

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STAND-BY
POWER

Guitar & Bass AWARD CHOICE 9/10

Dr Z Z-Lux

The Z-Lux promises to be a handwired, stripped down, souped up version of a classic. **HUW PRICE** flies with the eagles...

Mike Zaite is no newcomer to the high-end amp market. He started working on valve amps when he was just 13 years old, and Joe Walsh first played through one of his amps in 1988. When Walsh ordered a load more to take on a world tour with The Eagles in 1994, Zaite was able to quit his day job and Dr Z amps quickly garnered a great reputation amongst pro players throughout the US.

Dr Z amps have never been slavish reproductions. Most feature innovative twists, although some of Zaite's designs are clearly influenced by the classics. The Z-Lux is a case in point because it's a combo with a single 12-inch speaker, reverb and tremolo.

At first glace, the name and specs suggest a Fender Deluxe Reverb theme, but look a bit closer and it soon becomes obvious that there's a lot more to it. Many players love the old Deluxe Reverb because you can crank it up for valvey break-up at pub and club levels. The drawback is that 22 watts doesn't necessarily provide enough clean headroom to cut it when you're playing bigger gigs or with a loud drummer.

Dr Z's solution to the Deluxe headroom issue is more akin to two amps in one. With a power stage derived from the Dr Z Remedy model, the Z-Lux has four 6V6 power valves and a half-power switch. So it can run at 40 or 20 watts, while maintaining the juicy 6V6 tone that many of us love from small- and medium-sized American amps.

Compared to a Deluxe Reverb, the Z-Lux is more straightforward. There's just one channel, with spring reverb and a tremolo circuit that's valve-driven rather than optical. The amps ships with two footswitches: the first is a Fender lookalike dual switch for the reverb and tremolo, the second is a boost switch. Both have sturdy metal enclosures and plug directly into the rear panel adjacent to three speaker connections labeled 4, 8 and 16 ohms. The onboard speaker is custom made for Dr Z by Eminence and it's rated at 8 ohms.

The Z-Lux is one of those amps that just keeps on giving. It covers an impressive range of frenquencies and gain settings

All the controls should be familiar. From the left, they are labelled volume, treble, mid, bass, master, reverb, speed and depth, and they do exactly what you'd expect. Inside, the construction is pin neat with components handwired and cabling laid out immaculately.

Component spotters may be interested to learn that capacitor types are chosen specifically for each amplification stage and include Mallory 150s, Sprague Orange Drops and hand-made Jupiters. The transformers are all very substantial, and just like the various valve bases, potentiometers and sockets, they're attached directly to the aluminium chassis.

In use

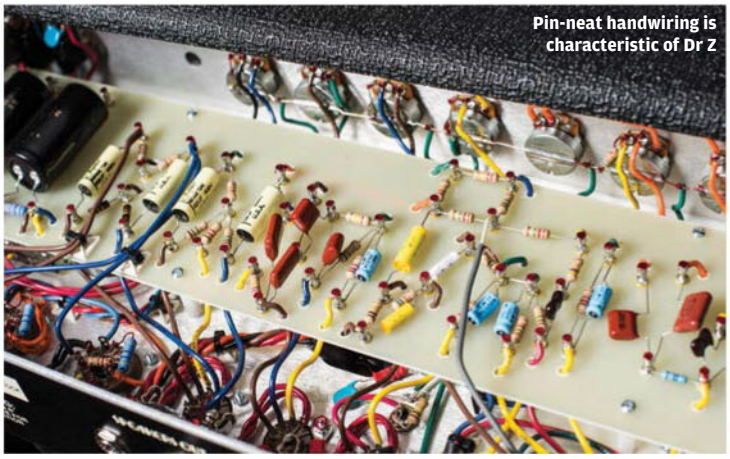
The Z-Lux is one of those amps that just keeps on giving. It's easy to dial in, covers an impressive range of >

The Z-Lux has four 6V6 power valves and, using the half-power switch, can run at 20 watts

KEY FEATURES
Dr Z Z-Lux

- **PRICE** £2,099
- **DESCRIPTION** Single-channel valve combo with spring reverb and tremolo, made in USA
- **POWER RATING** 20W/40W
- **VALVES** 4x 12AX7, 1x 12AT7, 4x 6V6
- **FRONT PANEL** volume, treble, mid, bass, master, reverb, speed, depth, standby, on/off
- **REAR PANEL** 3 speaker outputs (4, 8, 16-ohm), power switch
- **SPEAKER** Eminence Custom Z12
- **DIMENSIONS** 559x267x489mm
- **WEIGHT** 19kg/42lbs
- **CONTACT** Peach Guitars 01376 553016 **www.drzamps.com**

The Z-Lux is fitted with an 8-ohm speaker, custom made for Dr Z by Eminence, while two footswitches plug into the rear panel – one controlling tremolo and reverb and the other operating the boost function



Pin-neat handwiring is characteristic of Dr Z

The reverb and tremolo controls reside on the front panel

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

The **Carr Slant V6 £2,899** is another Fender-flavoured reverb combo with full/half-power switch plus cathode/fixed bias switching and two channels. Although resolutely tweedy, a second-hand **Victoria Double Deluxe circa £1,800** is essentially a 5E3 Deluxe with two 12-inch speakers and four 6V6 power tubes. **Fender's '68 Custom Vibrolux £1,089** has vintage silverface features and a 35-watt power stage.

frequencies and gain settings and can get very loud without hurting your ears. The underlying flavour is vintage and Fender-like, but thankfully devoid of the lifeless feel and glassy trebles that are sometimes associated with the more powerful Silverface models.

At full power, the Z-Lux has a big and three-dimensional tone that feels supple and dynamic with single coils as well as humbuckers. For clean tones, max out the master control and turn the gain up to achieve the optimum volume level. With single coils, things should stay clean so long as the gain control doesn't pass halfway.

When the Z-Lux starts overdriving, it comes on very smoothly and it's easy to dial in exactly the right amount. The overdrive responds really well to playing tough and I found it easy to find the point where digging in adds some 'hair' to the tone, but when playing lightly it's pure and clean.

When the Z-Lux starts overdriving, it comes on very smoothly and it's easy to dial in exactly the right amount

The tone controls are powerful and have a wide range. It's all too easy to have pre-conceived ideas about where tone controls should be set and draw spurious conclusions. Relying on your ears rather than your eyes is the best way to get the sound you want. I mostly kept the treble and bass controls below halfway regardless of the guitar I was playing, and I used the middle control to fine-tune the shading.

The reverb is outstanding. It manages to add a barely perceptible halo at low levels, but towards maximum you could be fooled into thinking the amp is in a different room. The reverb's well-voiced treble response gels really well with the guitar signal by not swamping clarity or definition with the intensity of the effect. As for the tremolo, I can only describe it as one of the prettiest I have heard. Regardless of intensity, it always remains playable and the speed range cannot be faulted. You would be hard pushed to find a pedal tremolo that sounds this beautiful.

The boost is perhaps the Z-Lux's cleverest feature. It's achieved by bypassing the tone stack and having no tone controls, or just a simple treble roll-off, and is more reminiscent of low- and mid-power tweed Fenders.

When cranked, the Z-Lux certainly veers towards tweedy heavy overdrive with boost engaged; I would guess there's some treble shaping going on because the treble remains sweet with the boost activated, but you get more midrange grind, extra body and a hint of compression in the lows. The master volume keeps the level in check and the power switch allows you to tailor the output to the size of the venue.

Although it does the job very well, the boost is not merely a switchable volume hike for soloing. It adds another dimension to the Z-Lux, and those of us with tweedy tendencies may choose to play with the boost engaged most of the time. It's a bit like having a bigger and louder 5E3 Deluxe with the added delights of reverb and tremolo.

Joe Walsh apparently considers the Z-Lux to be the best amp he owns. Regardless of how many amps are in his collection, the Z-Lux gives me no reason to doubt the veracity of this claim.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

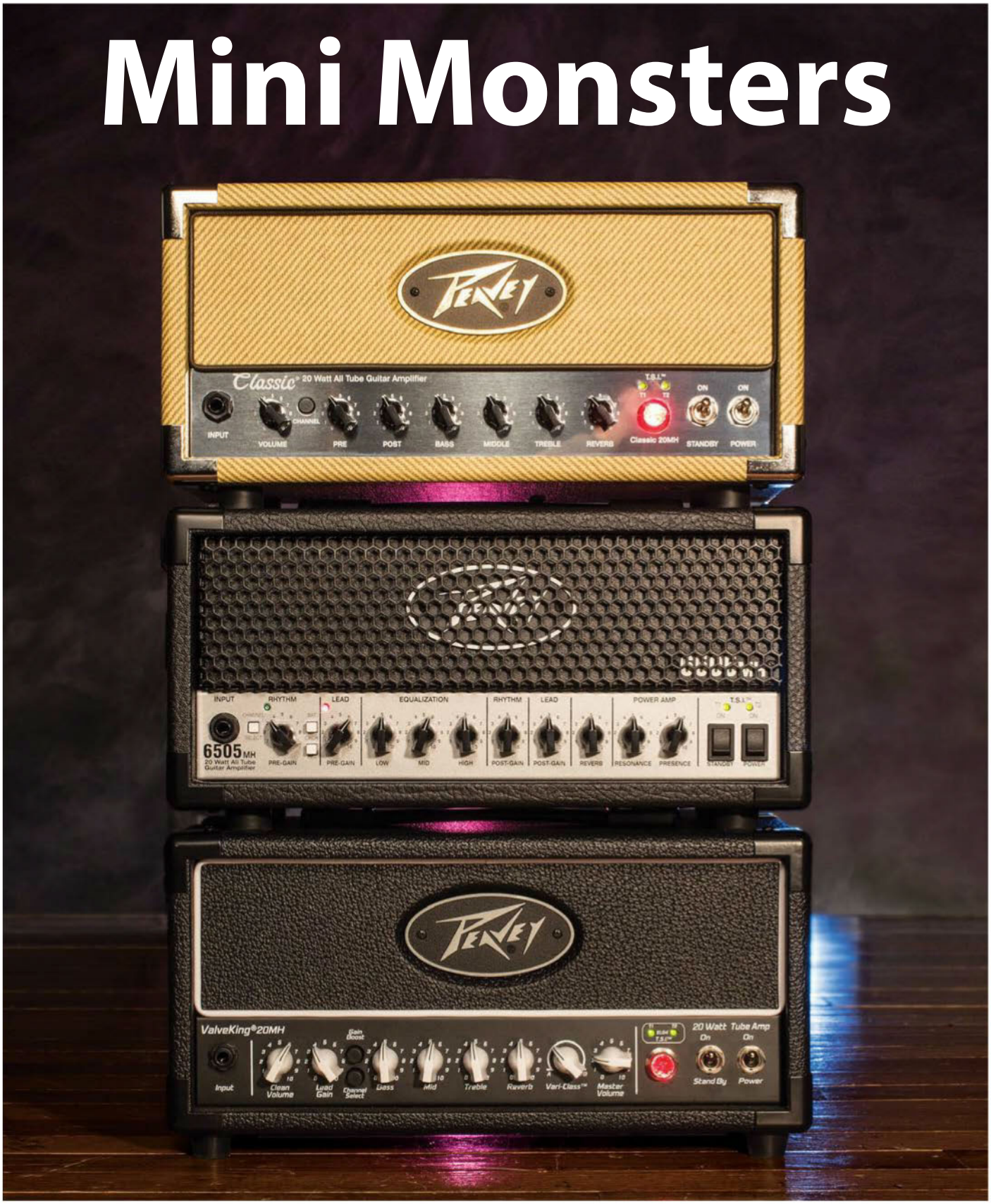
+ Delicious tone
+ Outstanding reverb and tremolo
+ Ships with footswitches
+ Boost feature doubles as tweed/blackface switch
+ Superb build quality
+ Also available in red and blonde

– Slightly noisy cooling fan

Vintage medium-power American tones and effects with none of the compromises. The Z-Lux is a simply excellent all-round amplifier

9/10

Mini Monsters



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Orange Micro Dark

Orange's latest hybrid head crams more gain than ever into a titchy package. **RICHARD PURVIS** gets out his magnifying glass...

Ta-daa! Orange cranked up the excitement before the launch of the Micro Dark with a social media campaign that challenged us to guess what its game-changing new product might be. An amp that could control the human mind via Bluetooth? A rotary speaker cabinet that could also churn butter? An all-valve spaceship? You could be forgiven a slight twinge of disappointment when it turned out to be essentially a cross between two existing products: the Micro Terror (very small) and the Dark Terror (very rock).

It's still a fine idea, though, and we'll forgive them if it sounds good. This is the latest in what is becoming a fairly long line of deceptively teeny Orange amps, all of them descended from the original Tiny Terror – which really was a game-changer – and in stark contrast to monstrous heads such as the OR120 with which the company first made its name.

Like the Micro Terror, this is a 20-watt hybrid amplifier, with a solid-state output stage and a single ECC83 in the preamp. The main benefit of this format is that it allows the amp to be genuinely 'micro', weighing little more than the average stompbox and taking up less space than a weasel's wardrobe. For a more practical comparison, it weighs less than a Blackstar Fly 3. The metal handle on the top hardly seems necessary when the whole box is so easily grabbed; maybe a padded case would have been more useful.

This is the latest in what's becoming a fairly long line of teeny Orange amps descended from the original Tiny Terror

On the inside, there's a new high-gain circuit – four stages, so not all of it can be coming from the valve – and there are several other differences from the white-cased version. The aux input is gone, a buffered effects loop has been added, and the tone knob has been replaced by a 'shape' control, as found on the other Dark models.

More than being merely a mid-scooper, this is an extremely clever tone-shaping tool and was the thing that we liked most about the Dark Terror when it was released back in 2011. Aside from that, there's just a master volume on the left and a preamp gain control on the right.

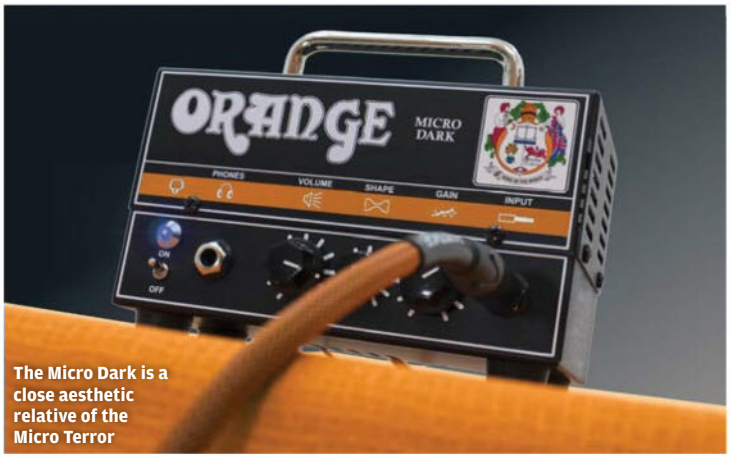
The Micro Dark runs on 15 volts and the included power supply comes in two parts – the adaptor itself and a separate kettle lead. Unscrew and lift off the 'cage' part of the amp for a better look at the chassis, and the first thing you'll notice is just how packed the circuit board is. The supplied valve is a JJ and there's a metal heat sink at the back, which probably accounts for more of the unit's 780g weight than the rest of the internal components put together.

A final feature worthy of note before we leap into the darkness is the headphone output, which has CabSim circuitry to "faithfully emulate the sound of a mic'd Orange 4x12 cabinet". This can also be used as a DI output for silent recording. >

KEY FEATURES

Orange Micro Dark

- **PRICE** £128
- **DESCRIPTION** 20-watt hybrid head with a solid-state output stage and ECC83/12AX7 preamp, made in China
- **FRONT PANEL** Power switch, headphone output (with speaker emulation for DI recording); master volume, shape, gain; guitar input
- **REAR PANEL** Effects loop send and return, 8/16-ohm speaker output
- **DIMENSIONS** 165x135x95mm
- **WEIGHT** 780g/1.7lbs
- **CONTACT** Orange Amps 020 8905 2828 **www.orangeamps.com**



The Micro Dark is a close aesthetic relative of the Micro Terror

Connect to a cabinet via the speaker output for truly big sounds

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

If you want the juiciness of an Orange but with less 'metal', try the standard **Micro Terror £99**. The **VHT i-30 £147** is another compact head with a single 12AX7 in the preamp and some handy input/output options, while a still tiny but louder hybrid option is the 100-watt **BluGuitar Amp1 £589**.

In use

In the words of Neil Young, rock 'n' roll can never DI... so we'll use the speaker output to begin with. Orange suggests its own PPC108 as a partner; this closed-back 1x8-inch cab is available in black, and would no doubt look proportional with the diminutive Micro Dark on its shoulders, but a 20-watt rock amp surely deserves bigger and better. Let's try an open-back 1x12 with a Greenback and a hefty 2x12 rated for 150 watts – if it doesn't kick bottom through those, we're all wasting our time.

But keep those tattoos covered for a moment, because this little thing does genuine cleans. With the volume set to full, single coils come out totally pure anywhere up to 10 o'clock on the gain dial – and while it sounds a tad lightweight through the Greenback, it's every bit as loud as an all-tube 20-watter through the bigger cab. This is not the most sophisticated tone, but there is a recognisable 'Orangeness' to the midrange, which can be accentuated or dialled out completely with the shape control. The master does a decent job of keeping things realistic at whispery levels, but this feature is surely going to be more useful once we move into overdriven settings.

Those settings arrive very quickly between 10 and 11 o'clock on the gain control. Don't expect sweet and spongy compression, but the crunch is smooth and natural, and by tweaking the shape you can set the EQ profile anywhere from woody British clonk to scooped American thump. Single coils tend to sound happiest on the chunkier left side of the dial, and humbuckers on the right, but you may find that your own guitars trample over that generalisation. What is clear is that this amp sounds way better through a large cab than a small, low-wattage one. It would look ridiculous perched on a full-size 4x12, but we're betting it would sound anything but.

It's classic rock to the left and modern metal to the right, and palm-muted djent chugging is not out of the question

And when you really, really crank it? The effect of the shape control now becomes even more dramatic: it's basically classic rock to the left and modern metal to the right, and palm-muted djent chugging is not out of the question with the bigger cab. Now is when you might want to have another look at the master volume control, if you have neighbours who aren't deaf already.

You should also be prepared to have a fiddle with your guitar's tone controls, as the lack of any dedicated treble filtering on the amp can become an issue. A noise gate would come in handy, too, as you're never very far away from a feedback squeal with the gain set high... but that's not going to save you from a noisefloor that was already on the high side at cleaner settings, and might now become slightly oppressive.

Finally, a word about the effects loop – which works exactly as you'd want it to without adding any more noise – and another word about the headphone/DI output, which sounds decent but won't really cut it for serious recording projects. It's bright, but not in an entirely convincing way, and scooped high-gain sounds are so fizzy they'll make you burp.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ High fiendishness-to-weight ratio
+ It does proper cleans as well as the filthy stuff
+ Shape control is a brilliant feature

– Needs a loud cab to sound like a grown-up amp
– Can get quite hissy
– Headphone/DI sound is a bit synthetic

It has its flaws, but to get this much power and versatility from a package so small – and so cheap – is an impressive feat

8/10

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Mike "McDuck" Olsen of Lake Street Dive with the EX-DC, a double-cutaway semi-hollow with the versatility to go from soul-rock warmth to bluesy buzz. Their new album, *Side Pony*, comes out February 19th on Nonesuch Records.

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AMPLIFIERS

Louis Electric Gattone

New Jersey's Louis Rosano constructs, tests and fine-tunes every Louis Electric amp. **HUW PRICE** tries out his tribute to Danny Gatton

In Ralph Heibutzki's Danny Gatton biography, he quotes Robbie Weaver, saying Gatton "had more amps than the law allowed". Over his career, Gatton played tweed Bandmasters, Bassmans and Twins, before moving on to blackface Super Reverbs and Vibrolux Reverbs.

Louis Rosano was making his version of a 5F8-A tweed Twin and sent one to Danny Gatton. It was so good that Gatton retired his vintage Twins and used the Louis Electric Twinmaster whenever he played larger venues. Rosano has been making valve guitar amps for 20 years and his client list includes some very big-name players.

The Gattone is Louis Electric's tribute to Gatton and it has an interesting mix of features. Like a late 40s Fender Super, the cabinet contains two 10-inch speakers and it's V-fronted. It's also made from plywood, and rather than using floating baffles, the speakers are mounted on thick 10-inch squares of ply that are each held tight to the front panel of the cabinet by eight screws.

The Gattone sent to us for review differs from the specs published on the Louis website in two significant areas. Firstly, the amp has a solid-state rectifier module plugged into the socket that should be home to a 5AR4 valve. Secondly, two Jupiter LC10 ceramic speakers have replaced a pair of Celestion G10s because Louis decided they sounded better in this amp.

Running a fixed biased pair of 6L6 power valves with a trio of 12AX7s and a 12AT7, the Gattone is handwired on what appears to be a moisture-resistant phenolic eyelet board. It has Mallory and Sprague capacitors as well as custom-wound power and output transformers. With onboard reverb and tremolo, plus two 8-ohm speakers paralleled for a 4-ohm load, the looks might evoke the 50s, but the specs seem closer to those of a stripped-down and tweaked blackface Vibrolux.

The looks might evoke the 50s, but the specs seem closer to those of a stripped-down and tweaked blackface Vibrolux

In use

A strong visual identity can create expectations that don't tally with the true nature of a product. The Gattone is a case in point, so let's begin by describing what it isn't. Despite appearances, the Gattone is no lightweight 50s replica designed for easy harmonic saturation, chewy grinding midrange, saggy soft lows or boxy cabinet resonance. Instead, you get clean headroom, tightly controlled lows and punchy attack. It has 50s and 60s tonal attributes, and although it doesn't reach the glassy transparency of a mid-powered blackface, that's the general feel.

Given the tweed covering, speaker configuration and the 35-watt power rating, it seems appropriate to compare the Gattone with a '56 Fender 5F4 Super variant that I've been servicing. The Fender has a lot more upper-treble chime and harmonic complexity, but >

The black control panel provides a clearer indication of the tonality than the tweed covering

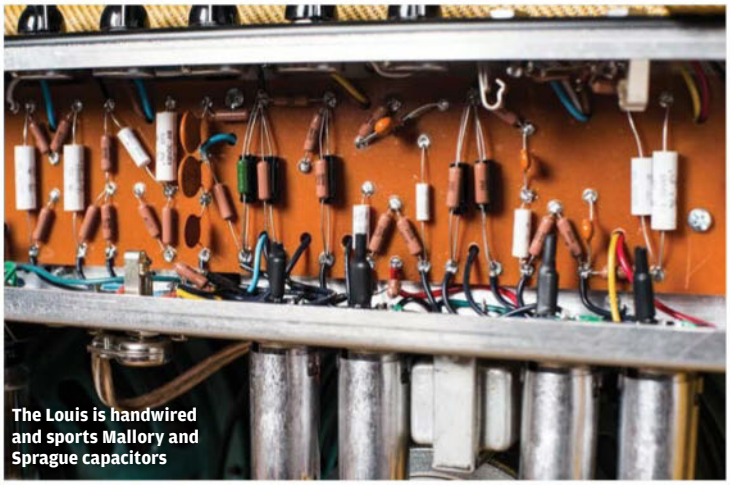
KEY FEATURES

Louis Electric Gattone

- **PRICE** £2,349
- **DESCRIPTION** One-channel valve combo, made in the USA
- **POWER RATING** 35W
- **VALVES** 3x 12AX7, 1x 12AT7, 2x 6L6
- **TOP PANEL** 2x input jacks, volume, treble, middle, bass, reverb, speed, intensity, standby, on/off
- **SPEAKERS** 2x Jupiter LC10
- **DIMENSIONS** 482x610x229mm
- **WEIGHT** 21.7kg/48lbs
- **CONTACT** Coda Music 01438 350815 www.louiselectricamps.com

Round the back, a pair of Jupiter LC10 ceramic speakers has been preferred to the stock Celestion G10s. With a good Telecaster, it's a combination that delivers

The solid-state rectifier module sits beside a pair of 6L6 power valves



The Louis is handwired and sports Mallory and Sprague capacitors

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...
For blackface vibe and tone, check out the **Clark Belmont Reverb $2,775** or even a **Fender Custom Vibrolux Reverb £1,100**. For a tweedier sound, check out the **Gartone Bluesman £2,050** with four 6V6s, or the **Lazy J 40 £2,099** with reverb and tremolo.

the low end is softer and breaks up more quickly.

The ceramic speakers contribute to the Gattone's smoother treble and upper-mid response, but it's the nature of the circuit too. The midrange control dials in fatter 50s mids, so you're not stuck with a scooped, 60s-style Fender tone, but it's there if you want it. The Gattone sounds even across the frequency range, but an aggressive and slightly piercing resonance is audible when playing the high E string around the 12th fret on my test guitars.

With vintage-spec Stratocaster single coils running into the high input, the Gattone stays clean until the volume reaches 9 (out of 12). Tele bridge pickups and PAFs push the Gattone into overdrive sooner, and this amp really makes sense when you play a Telecaster through it. Fifties-style Strats sound a little underpowered, but a Tele bridge pickup and the Gattone talk like old friends. You get twang with solidity, and bite without ice-picky treble. Most of us would struggle to play like Danny Gatton, but a decent T-type and the Gattone allow you to at least nail his tone, if not his technique.

As volume is rolled further up beyond 9, the overdrive increases, along with brightness, but the Gattone's punchy attack is retained. Some may prefer a touch more sag or compression, especially when it can get as fierce as this. This is where a valve rectifier might help matters. The dual 10-inch speaker configuration is very directional and I soon learned to stand out of the firing line in order to prevent ear fatigue.

The reverb impresses with its tone and depth. The control is progressive and it can go from a hint of roominess to something so cavernous it drowns out the dry signal. The tremolo isn't quite as stellar. A tad choppy, the speed isn't quite slow enough at the lowest setting, and beyond around three quarters it gets so fast that it becomes a blur and loses its intensity.

The reverb impresses. It can go from a hint of roominess to something so cavernous it drowns out the dry signal

The Gattone seems to work best at low-ish to medium volume, and within this sweet spot I'd describe the sound as 'produced'. It's not unlike a carefully mic'd up guitar sound that has been enhanced by quality outboard processing and refined with a classic equaliser. As the review model arrived with a solid-state rectification module installed, I hoped that simply swapping it for a valve rectifier would soften the touch dynamics. However, Louis Electric advised against it because the power valves would need to be re-biased as a result.

While the Gattone isn't the most dynamically thrilling amp, it's not designed to be. If you have high-quality guitars and want an amp that allows their individual voices and your playing to shine, the Gattone fits the bill. It has a quality signal path that adds just enough character and avoids the sterility of certain 'pedal platform' amplifiers. The Gattone wouldn't be ideal for garagey grunginess, heavy blues or even classic rock, but it's very well suited to cleaner blues styles, jazz, fingerstyle and country picking.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Outstanding build quality
+ Solid and punchy tone
+ Impressive clean headroom
+ Wonderful reverb
+ Always allows the guitar tone to shine through

– Very little natural compression
– Heavy overdrive rather ragged
– Tremolo can sound a bit choppy

A fitting tribute to one of America's greatest players from one of its finest boutique amplifier builders

8/10

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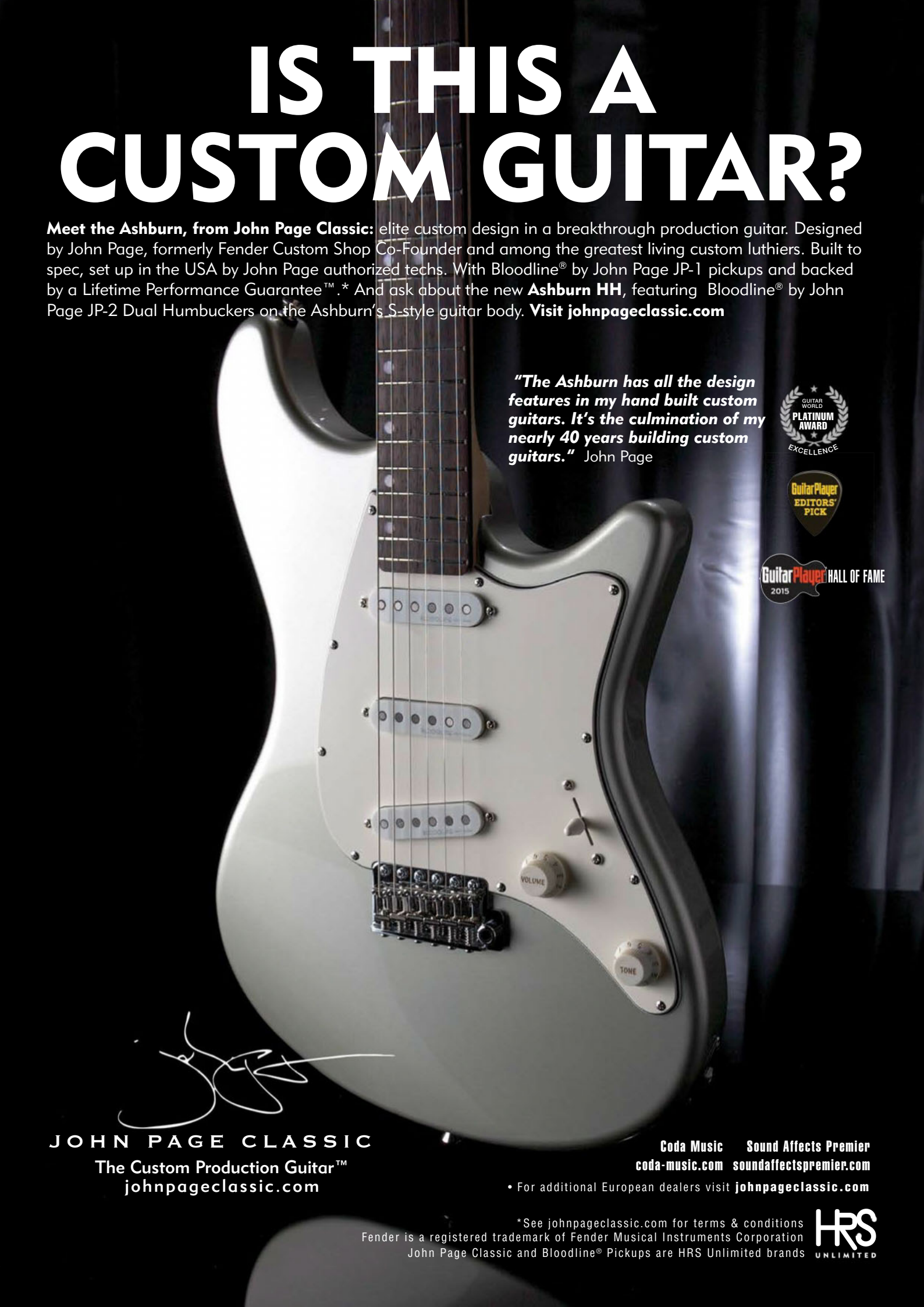

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TC Electronic Sentry & HyperGravity

The humble compressor and noise gate obtain a high-tech Danish makeover. **SIMON BRADLEY** dons the white coat...

As the range of TC Electronics stompboxes continues to grow, their appearance on an increasing number of professional and amateur boards continues. Some, such as the Hall Of Fame reverb and Flashback delay, are becoming the default choice for many, while units such as the Ditto have opened up new musical avenues hitherto scorned by the more technophobic incumbents of the guitar-playing community.

On test here, we have two additions to the range; a sophisticated noise gate and a multiband compressor. Both possess the same modest footprint as their TC siblings and come fully equipped with TonePrint compatibility. We went into detail about TonePrint in October's issue but, in a nutshell, the system allows you to 'beam' artist settings direct from the relevant app on your smartphone into the pedal via your guitar's pickups. Yeah, and pigs might fly, right? Well, pop a saddle on Captain Oinksalot because the concept works seamlessly and it's arguably the simplest way of getting your favourite guitar player's personal settings into your own rig.

Sentry

The Sentry includes a trio of dedicated pots: threshold, which sets the gate's sensitivity; damp, which controls the ferocity of the gate's closing, and decay, for regulating how your notes fade in relation to the gate's aperture. There are also two modes alongside the TonePrint option, accessed by a three-way micro toggle. Gate relates to the pedal's single-band gate nature, while hiss is the multiband option that, as it's name suggests, is best suited to obliterating hisses and spits.

Both pedals come with their own USB cable and can be powered either by an optional nine-volt PSU or PP3 battery, the compartment for which can be located by removing the baseplate's single screw. Also within is a pair of dip switches, one of which alternates between true or buffered bypass operation, while the second has no the function we're aware of.

The Sentry also includes a mono effects loop to allow you to feed any noise-producing items – overdrives, for example – through the pedal. This lets the gate be triggered by the direct signal, not the noise produced by your vintage Big Muff, and might just prove to be the Sentry's USP.

To get the best out of the Sentry in practical terms we had to fine-tune the settings to get the gate in the right place with the minimum amount of hiss

In use

Anyone already familiar with TC pedals will be aware of how advanced they can be yet, with many of them, it's usually far more fun to dive straight in and find your own sounds. Here, though, we quickly discovered that to get the best out of the Sentry in purely practical terms we had to fine-tune the >

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

HyperGravity

We're utterly enamoured with the **EBS Red Label MultiComp** (**£149**) and are sure you would be too: try it as a matter of urgency. It's also impossible to ignore the genre-defining **Boss CS-3 compressor** (**£59**) while, for that undeniable taste of boutique charm, check the **Wampler Ego** (around **£165**).

Sentry

The **BOSS NS-2** (**£65**) finds itself on many a board and for good reason: it's easy to use and works very well indeed. **Dunlop's M135 Smart Gate** (around £140) keeps things simple with a single knob and three modes, while the **Hush 2X** from the daddies of hiss removal, **Rocktron** (around **£126**), features two channels of noise reduction plus an effects loop.

settings to get the gate in just the right place to let the note through with the minimum amount of hiss. Arguably the only way to do this with the required level of accuracy is on your computer or iPad using the truly brilliant TonePrint editor; the trio of controls will only get you so far. It does take some tinkering with, but it's certainly worth it and reassuringly easy to use once you get the hang of it.

For our sound tests, we stuck with what we feel are likely to be the two most common noise sources for guitarists: single-coil hum and the hiss of an overdriven rock amp turned up to stun.

Going for a reasonably driven blues-style tone with our Road Worn Stratocaster through a Blackstar combo, the Sentry worked a little of its magic almost straight away, removing the single-coil hum without infringing on the tone. In hiss mode, we found that we could easily find the threshold and needed only a couple of minutes to set the decay and damp to suit our tastes. The pedal's LED changes from red to green when the gate is open, too, which helps greatly in finding the sweet spot.

Eliminating noise from a high-gain rig is a somewhat more elaborate task that involved a spot of delving with the TonePrint editor in gate mode. Be warned, though: as with all noise gates we have had experience with, we found obtaining a natural sustain without causing the gate to close, thus chopping off the signal, did take some time to get just right – and we're still not totally happy with our results.

Perhaps the most important question to address when considering the usefulness of the HyperGravity is simply do you actually need a pedal-based noise gate? As ever, that will be down to the intricacies of your own rig and circumstances, but we're pretty sure Stevie Ray Vaughan didn't bother with one when faced with the undoubtedly ear-lacerating maelstrom of his Tube Screamer'd Fender backline. That said, if you are in the market, they don't get better than the Sentry.

HyperGravity

The multiband concept is also applied with TC's newest stompbox compressor. Alongside three pots whose operation will be familiar to you from other compressors on the market is the blend control, which mixes the dry signal with the compressed tone.

The HyperGravity's two modes – known as spectra and vintage – offer a choice of either a sparkling, hi-fidelity compression or the darker, more pronounced squeeze of a vintage pedal, the latter coming from a recreation of circuitry taken from an analogue classic.

In use

According to TC, one sonic trait of multiband compression is that you can ensure no part of the tonal spectrum is compressed too heavily or lightly. Getting into the guts with the TonePrint editor lets you address the muffled high-end by dialling the compression back in that area, leaving the mid and lows unsquashed. The blend control ensures the squeezing never becomes intrusive and, by keeping the sustain low and the level to around 60 percent, the HyperGravity becomes what every player craves: a 'sounds better' pedal, especially with a touch of amp drive.

The HyperGravity's two modes offer either a sparkling hi-fidelity compression or the more pronounced squeeze of a vintage pedal

From meaty country pickin' to choppy funked-up rhythms, the HyperGravity covers all bases well and should you prefer the grungy asphyxiation of those classic analogue comps, vintage mode is genuinely indistinguishable from the real thing. We like the HyperGravity; it's easy to use, sounds great and is never too heavy on the squeeze – unless you set it so.

Incorporating the standard TC Electronic mix of science and innovation with a straightforward system of operation and quality tones, these are two pedals worth jotting onto your 'must try' list.

KEY FEATURES

TC Electronic Sentry

- **PRICE** £99
- **DESCRIPTION** Multiband noise gate pedal with its own effects loop, two modes (gate and hiss) and access to TC's TonePrint library of custom settings. Made in Thailand
- **CONTROLS** Threshold, damp and decay pots, three-way mode selector, two internal DIP switches, mono ¼" input and output plus send and return
- **FEATURES** True or buffered bypass, effect on/off indicator, 9V DC external power input, battery compartment
- **DIMENSIONS** 65 (w) x 32 (h) x 120mm (l)
- **CONTACT** TC Electronic **www.tcelectronic.com**

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Two useful modes
+ Especially good with cleaner tones
+ Doesn't effect the dry tone

– Can be a little unforgiving
– Requires some tinkering
– Not everyone will need one

If you need a pedal-based noise gate, then this is probably the one. If you don't, you're unlikely to give it more than a cursory glance, which would be a shame

7/10

KEY FEATURES

TC Electronic HyperGravity

- **PRICE** £99
- **DESCRIPTION** Multiband compressor pedal with two modes (spectra and vintage), alongside access to TC's TonePrint library of custom settings. Made in Thailand
- **CONTROLS** Sustain, level, attack and blend pots, three-way mode selector, two internal DIP switches, mono ¼" input and output
- **FEATURES** True or buffered bypass, effect on/off indicator, 9V DC external power input, battery compartment
- **DIMENSIONS** 65 (w) x 32 (h) x 120mm (l)
- **CONTACT** TC Electronic **www.tcelectronic.com**

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Great vintage tones
+ Equally good modern comps
+ Easy to use
+ Offers guaranteed tone improvement

– None

In an increasingly cluttered market, TC ensures the HyperGravity is right up there thanks to it's no-nonsense layout and excellent tones. A genuine 'sounds better' pedal

9/10

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Fulltone Solid State Tape Echo

Based on the iconic Echoplex EP-3, this hotly anticipated tape delay doesn't come cheap. **SAM ATKINS** tries not to get too attached...

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Strymon's El Capistan £250 crams three distinct 'tape' machines into a smaller enclosure. The **Catalinbread Belle Epoch £161** offers an impressive emulation of the EP-3 Echoplex, while **Mooer Audio's Ana Echo £50** offers analogue sounds at a bargain price.

Let's square up to the elephant in the room straight from the off. The Fulltone Solid State Echo (SSTE) costs the same as 14 Mooer Reecho delay pedals and you could fit eight of them in its footprint. It will need regular professional maintenance to ensure it always sounds perfect and it will require a new tape cartridge every year, subject to usage. The cost of a new cartridge is equivalent to the price of another Mooer pedal.

When Mike Fuller of Fulltone announced that his interpretation of the Maestro Echoplex EP-3 solid-state delay unit was due to be released this year, guitar forums lit up with expectation – along with the ubiquitous naysayers. Fuller had mooted a solid state alternative to his valve-driven Tube Tape Echo as far back as 2009, so has the wait been worthy of the hype?

Before we try to answer that, let's offer up some background on Fulltone. Most guitar players will have heard of, owned or know someone who has used a Fulltone OCD pedal. Fuller pulls no punches in describing his product range as some of the best pedals available to buy, and we would agree. In 2004, Fulltone launched the Tube Tape Echo (TTE) delay unit and it was a beast of a machine with an equally beastly price tag. The TTE is based on the tube-driven Maestro Echoplex EP-2 unit of the 60s and replicates those vintage tape delays perfectly and reliably; it can be found in many studios around the world. It's gone through a variety of updates and improvements along the way, leading to the rather smart-looking black-cased model that's available today.

The SSTE shares the DNA of those early EP-3 units beloved of many a guitarist – we're looking at you Jimmy Page and Brian May – for their preamp sound

The SSTE is housed in a similar but much smaller tolex-covered wooden enclosure with a removable lid, and shares the DNA of those early EP-3 units beloved of many a guitarist – we're looking at you Jimmy Page and Brian May – for their preamp sound. Fulltone has worked hard to eradicate the issues that plagued those Maestro units (most notably the shaky reliability and the excessive hum). The SSTE is more of a homage and not a direct copy of the EP-3; and while we're on the subject of preamps, the SSTE has an identical TIS58 JFET circuit to the first EP-3 produced, which allows you to achieve those cutting highs without the bass muddying up your tone.

The SSTE's launch didn't quite go as planned as the first 80 or so units sent out to dealers developed a fault with the capstan rubber roller (a critical component that moves the tape around the spools), resulting in very wobbly repeats. Fulltone was quick to rectify the issue and offered to send out free replacement rollers. Teething issues well and truly out of the way, it's time to plug in and play.

In use

Having had the opportunity to use a 70s Maestro EP-3 unit – and especially given that this is a real tape echo machine with moving parts, so there are operating sounds – we weren't expecting the SSTE to be nearly as quiet as it is.

You still get the option to use the SSTE as a preamp-only unit, with the ability to select 'full' or 'EP-3' modes, but you probably won't want to part with £729 for this function alone when the excellent Xotic EP Booster pedal does the same job for £100.

Let's move on to the controls available to the player. There are two small control knobs that allow for the adjustment of instrument volume and recording levels. An impressive clean boost of 10db is available, which makes great use of the JFET preamp and allows for those distinctive treble tones, as we mentioned earlier.

The delay time available is a full second. That may not sound like much compared to some modern, pedalboard-friendly digital options on the market, but that single second sounds rich and full. The movable playback head can take you from authentic vintage slapback to studio-like EMT140 plate reverb tones and full-on dreamy delays for the shoegazers among us. Manipulation of the controls for echo volume and echo repeats can deliver full-on oscillation, and along with a neat toggle that allows you to select brilliant and vintage modes for the echo highs, it's certainly not short on options.

You'll have to look elsewhere for stereo in/outs, as it's a strictly old-school mono experience here. There's an echo cancel input that, with the optional Fulltone footswitch, is a passive option to kill the delays without any horrible pops as it routes the signal away from the switcher box.

G&B gave the SSTE a spin using a range of guitars (a vintage Gibson Les Paul Deluxe, a Fender Telecaster 1952 reissue and Gibson Les Paul Studio) and amplifiers (Fender's '68 Custom Princeton, a Supro Dual-Tone 1624T and the new Vox AC10C1) and the tonal variations of each combination of guitar and amp require some adjustment of the SSTE. The Les Pauls have a tendency to achieve almost distorted repeats, unless you reduce the record level knob, but flicking the echo highs switch to the brilliant setting lends a subtle openness to the delay tone. Single coils inevitably benefit from a little more record level and to our ears, with the preamp in full mode and the echo highs on vintage, you're transported back instantly to those thick and warm echo-delay tones that are peppered across so many great albums from the late 60s and 70s. The SSTE really does reward those who like to make small adjustments, play their guitar and then tweak things again. We lost ourselves for hours fine-tuning the controls on the unit to match each amp and guitar and then photographing those settings to save for future use.

This is a player's effects unit. It will reward those willing to invest a lot time and effort (and money!) in fine-tuning the controls to suit their rig. It's also a fantastic machine to have around in a studio environment and it certainly looks the business.

Would anyone at a gig know that you're playing through a real tape delay unit that probably costs more than you'll ever earn from said gig, rather than a cheap digital delay pedal costing the price of just a few rounds of drinks? Probably not. But this brings us firmly into the territory of those unseen pleasures of guitar playing – that feeling you get when you're playing a particular guitar, using a coveted pedal or when you find 'your' sound in a special amp. Sometimes it's not about your audience at all, it's about the feeling that you're playing with something special and your interaction with that particular piece of gear. This way inspiration lies...

The Fulltone SSTE is a joy to play with. It's mechanical, solid and alive and even in this digital era there's something that's still hugely appealing about seeing and hearing moving parts.

There are no secondary controls or fancy beaming of digital effects presets from your iPad or your mobile phone. True, it's temperamental and it needs kid gloves, but for the right player this will be a joy to own. Hopefully, like its valve-powered big brother the TTE, the SSTE will find its way into recording studios around the world so that those who can't afford it can experience the thrill of using it.

In the days of tiny stompbox effects, fly rigs and lunchbox amps, it's easy to think of a solid-state tape echo unit as an anachronism, but much like the 100-watt stack, machines of this type have earned their place in guitar folklore and as such, everyone should get the chance to play through one at least once, however impractical it seems.

KEY FEATURES

Fulltone Solid State Tape Echo

- **PRICE** £729
- **DESCRIPTION** Tape delay unit
- **CONTROLS** Vintage and brilliant modes for old-school or modern tape delay tones, two preamp modes, separate instrument and echo volume controls, two switchable tape speeds for short or long (one sec) delays
- **FEATURES** 1/4" tape and ball-bearing equipped Fulltone ETC-1 tape cartridge, true-bypass toggle switch, relay-activated footswitchable echo cancel
- **DIMENSIONS** 244mm (w) x 198mm (d) x 160mm (h)
- **WEIGHT** 4.2kg/9.2lbs
- **CONTACT** www.fulltone.com

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ A real working tape delay unit for amateur and professional players
+ With adjustments, it sounds great with all pickup types
+ Plenty of controls to shape your sound
+ Solid build with attractive looks
+ Perfect for professional recording environments

– Price point makes it way out of reach for most
– Minor technical issues on launch models
– Ongoing maintenance required to retain optimum sound

An incredible-sounding 'Holy Grail' unit, but buying and maintaining it may be beyond mere mortals

7/10

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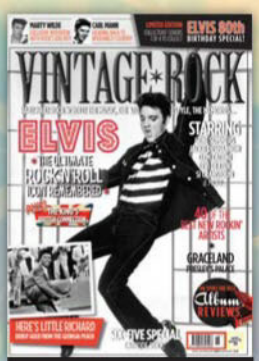

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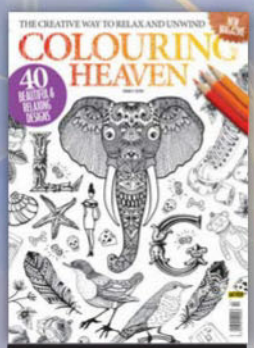

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Guitar & Bass AWARD CHOICE 9/10

Smorg Pedalboards Grab400

Combining frame construction with a flat surface, do Smorg's boards provide the best of both worlds? **CHRIS VINNICOMBE** finds out...

Our round-up of compact pedalboards back in September proved that there's plenty of competition, but that hasn't stopped Smorg Pedalboards bringing a stylish new design to the fight. Smorg (aka Daniel Adams) hand-builds custom boards to order in the UK and its recently-introduced Grab range is structured around three standard sizes.

The Grab400 is 400mm wide; you can probably guess how much additional width the Grab500 and 600 models provide. All three units are available with or without Smorg's own satchel-style gigbags and fixing pack and are 190mm deep, lightweight aluminium designs made with raw materials sourced from local suppliers.

Pedaltrain's near industry-standard design provides the most obvious point of comparison, but Smorg's boards are different, principally because effects pedals can be anchored to a flat surface, rather than rails. This offers greater stability under stomping feet, but thanks to a generous rear cut-out you can still route a power supply unit and cabling out of sight and harm's way underneath.

Although the board comes pre-velcro'd with a useful surface area of 350x125mm, you can add more loop tape and go right to the edges if you need to. The proportions of the Grab400 cope with five Boss or MXR-sized pedals plus wiring, but the rear rail is wide enough to support micro pedals arranged sideways, so you can squeeze a lot of effects onto a small footprint here should the need arise.

In use

Once you've attached your stompboxes, non-slip rubber feet ensure that the Grab400 isn't going to slide around, while the rear feet (15mm larger than those at the front) create a pleasing angle for stage use that also allows power supply units of up to about 30mm in height to sit firmly affixed beneath without issues. Smorg lists Diago's Powerstation and Micropower9, TheGigRig's Generator and the Cioks Adam and DC5 units among those that fit comfortably. We used a Pedaltrain Volto with no difficulties.

The cable ties and self-adhesive bases supplied in the fixing pack are by far the best way to organise your cabling underneath, while the padded gigbag's oversized flap provides the capacity to accommodate heavily-loaded boards. Those of you who have either perfected the 'one journey from the car' load-in or rely on public transport to get to gigs will note the absence of a shoulder strap on the case; this, plus an external pocket for cables and ephemera would have made the whole package nigh-on perfect.

Though web forums bristle with all-singing, all-dancing multi-tier boards wired up using clever switching devices and independent loops, the overwhelming majority of gigging guitarists can take care of business with a low-to-medium-power amp and four or five stompboxes. If that sounds like you, the Grab400 is an excellent choice, but if you do need something bigger, Smorg can build that too.

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE... The ubiquitous **Pedaltrain Nano+ £42** is very difficult to beat at such an attractive price. **Temple Audio Designs' Solo 18 £69** offers an innovative design, using screw-on plates rather than velcro mounting, while the **Diago Sprinter £39** is a simpler alternative.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Lightweight but robust
+ Sleek, well thought-out design
+ Sensible pricing

- No shoulder strap or additional pocket on softcase

Despite strong competition, Smorg's stylish and affordable boards are well worth checking out

9/10

KEY FEATURES

Smorg Pedalboards Grab400

- **PRICE** £69.99 + P&P (inc softcase and 'fixing pack' containing 700mm of hook velcro, cable ties and cable tie bases) or £39.99 + P&P for board only
- **DESCRIPTION** Lightweight aluminium pedalboard with loop velcro surface. Made in the UK
- **DIMENSIONS** 400 (w) x 190 (d) x 50mm (h)
- **CONTACT** Smorg Pedalboards 07971 926898 **smorgpedalboards.co.uk**

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Gibson Pro Audio LP6

These flamboyant-looking monitors are inspired by one of the world's most famous guitar designs. **HUW PRICE** has a listen...

Gibson's new range of Les Paul monitors could be viewed as a fitting tribute to the man himself. Besides inspiring one of the most iconic electric guitars, Les Paul's credentials as a studio innovator and inventor are second to none and he is widely credited as the originator of multitrack recording.

Gibson's efforts to carry Les Paul guitar stylings over into the realm of studio monitors mean that the finish options on the front baffle are Tobacco Sunburst, Cherry and Cherry Sunburst. And yes, the finish is high-gloss nitrocellulose.

Contoured to resemble the iconic shape that we all know and love, the baffle is described as 'carved flame maple'. Our LP6 set arrived in 1960-style Cherry Sunburst; the flames aren't much in evidence and it's actually a maple veneer rather than solid maple, but from a resonance standpoint that actually proves to be preferable.

Other guitar-themed features include faux cream plastic binding around the front ports and baffle and a cream plastic tweeter waveguide. Shiny chrome forms the woofer surround and tweeter plug, and Les Paul's iconic signature appears on the non-woven carbon cone of the six-inch woofer. The Gibson logo backlights to indicate power status.

Speaker-specific features include balanced TRS jack, XLR and unbalanced RCA inputs. In addition to the power switch, there's another switch for standby mode, which engages after 30 minutes when no audio signal is detected. Three knobs provide control over volume, bass and treble; we couldn't find any reference to the frequency points in Gibson's literature, but the tone controls are indented for easy matching.

I can picture the LP6 sitting on a rock producer's meter bridge, where the sound would complement the looks

In use

The LP6s sound like a perfectly credible and usable set of studio monitors. Background noise is low, 247 watts is more than adequate for medium-sized control rooms and the overall sound shows no sign of being obviously hyped at any frequency point.

That said, to my ears, the sound is a bit 'top and bottom' rather than flat across the midrange. That translates into airy trebles and good solid bass, but there is some lack of detail and definition in the mids. Some source material sounds slightly edgy too, but that impression may diminish after the LP6s are run in. Stereo imaging is fairly good, but not quite as pinpoint as some of the competition at the LP6's price point. With dense mixes, elements can take on a slightly blurred quality, which makes them harder to pin down in the left/right picture. Bass extension is impressive and the LP6 doesn't port chuff at all. However, the bass response is not particularly speedy or precise when things get really dubby and deep.

Les Paul's name has become so synonymous with a certain model of electric guitar, the very idea of a Les Paul reference monitor may seem a bit odd. He certainly contributed to the design process of his eponymous instrument, but it's safe to assume Lester never beta tested the LP6.

The LP6 is a decent mid-priced studio monitor – with a considerable up charge for its looks. Even so, the looks may be enough to win you over and I can certainly picture the LP6 sitting on a rock producer's meter bridge, where the up-front and exuberant sound would complement the aesthetic.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Very distinctive looks
+ Rock 'n' roll vibe
+ Auto standby mode
+ Ample power

- Sound quality not best in class
- Imaging can be vague
- Midrange slightly lacking detail

Although the LP6 is a usable monitor, its looks are perhaps more of a selling point than its features and sound quality

7/10

KEY FEATURES

Gibson Pro Audio LP6

- **PRICE** £699 each
- **DESCRIPTION** Bi-amped active studio monitor
- **TWEETER** 1" Diamond-like carbon-coated titanium
- **WOOFER** 6" non-woven carbon
- **FREQUENCY RANGE** (-10dB) 37Hz-47kHz
- **CROSSOVER FREQUENCY** (acoustic) 2.7kHz
- **MAXIMUM PEAK SPL** (limiter engaged) per pair 117dB
- **SYSTEM POWER** (Hi+lo amp combined) 247 watts
- **AMPLIFIER DISTORTION** <0.2%THD+N 20Hz - 20kHz (-3dB max power)
- **SNR** (signal to noise ratio) >92dB
- **BASS ADJUST SWITCH** -4dB, -2dB, -1dB, 0, +1dB, +2dB, +4dB
- **TREBLE ADJUST SWITCH** -4dB, -2dB, -1dB, 0, +1dB, +2dB, +4dB
- **INPUT CONNECTORS** RCA, Balanced TRS, Balanced XLR
- **DIMENSIONS** 356x230x300mm
- **WEIGHT** 8.2kg
- **CONTACT** Focusrite UK 01494 462246 www.gibson.com

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE... The Gibson LP6 faces serious competition from well-respected and long-established monitor manufacturers, including the **ADAM A77X £644**, **Genelec 8040 BPM £629**, **EVE Audio SC305 £555**, **Mackie HR824 Mk2 £576** and the **Focal CMS65 £538**.

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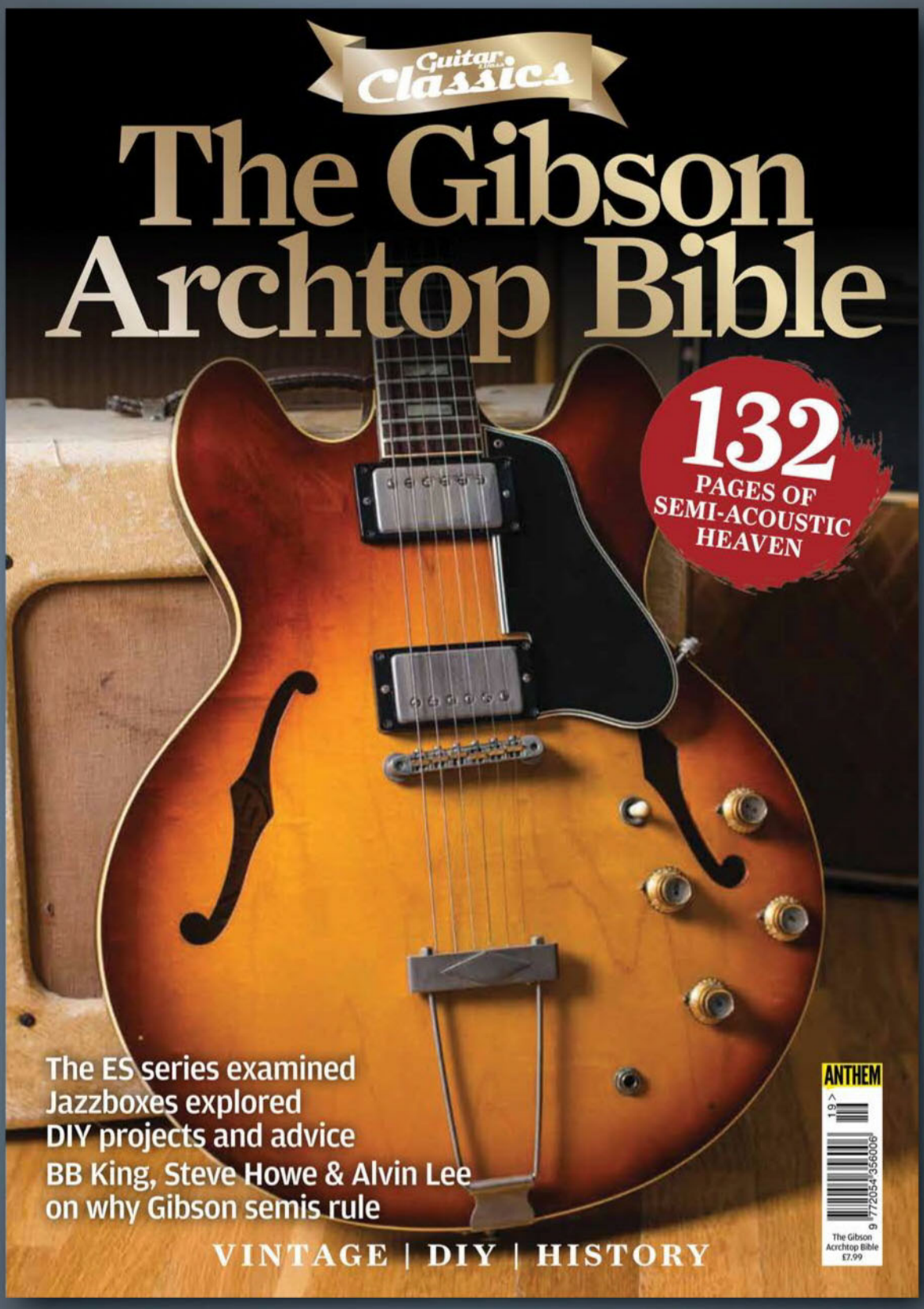

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Guitar & Bass AWARD CHOICE 9/10

Hartke HyDrive HCH210 500W Bass Cabinet

Popular for their bright clean sound, Hartke amps date back to the 1970s. **GARETH MORGAN** looks at the company's new 500-watt cab

Hartke Systems was established in the late 70s by schoolmates Larry Hartke and Ron Lorman, becaming renowned for the aluminium-coned speakers fitted to its bass cabinets. First available in 1985, Weather Report's Jaco Pastorius gave them a head start by gigging a prototype worldwide for a year, and they soon became popular. The shiny silver cones were a visual boon and the bright, clean tone made them immediately a serious choice amongst the clarity-starved bass fraternity.

Recently, Hartkes have been paired with traditional cabs, with paper coned drivers offering more fundamental depth. It's a trend that inspired Hartke to develop paper/aluminium hybrid units designed to allow the discerning bassist to have their tonal cake and eat it. These cabs make up the HyDrive series, which now boasts the addition of the HCH210 we have for review.

The HyDrive 210 is a porting-free, basic oblong constructed from birch plywood using the dado joinery method, and is also extensively braced. At 371mm high by 612mm wide and 383mm deep, its moderate proportions and weight of 17.7kg (39lb) equate to a highly reasonable lug for the 500 watts on offer. Dressed in a mottled black vinyl cover, with steel corners and rubber feet, Hartke fits one shiny, recessed metal carry handle for lugging purposes. This is fine for your in and out of venue heft, but for smaller nudges, we'd have preferred another on the opposite side or an additional carry handle on the top. Just a thought...

A chunky silver-coloured steel grille dominates the vista, a large badge screams the company's name and a smaller offering, the model's moniker. Beneath this lurks a pair of Hartke's HyDrive 10-inch speakers with paper/aluminium hybrid cones and rare earth neodymium magnets and a one-inch tweeter with attenuation switch on the back.

Hooked up to a Hartke HA2500 head, the HyDrive 210 spits out impressive low-end bump for a sealed unit

Sounds

Hooked up to a Hartke HA2500 head, the HyDrive 210 spits out impressive low-end bump for a sealed unit. There's depth and warmth without a hint of wooliness, so if your axe is B-string equipped, be confident you'll hear the note and not just feel it. We cranked the amp and were delighted to discover the cab will also handle being driven hard without inducing unwanted clanky excesses; the HyDrive 210 is just clean and loud. Of course, hollow stages and platforms are going to have an effect on any speaker cabinet, but you may find the smaller drivers/sealed enclosure combination will cut this back a bit.

There's no hint of unwanted colouring to the midrange, so if you desire tonally even and expressive, dark and soupy or snappy and gurgly, it'll reproduce that without necessary recourse to tonal correction facilities. Highs are well realised without involving the horn, and the cabinet responds musically to your playing dynamics: play softer for smoother notes or dig in a bit for bite and aggression. Activating the horn is brighter and more aggressively cutting, but at either half or full level it rapidly induces the presence of fret clank in all but the lightest of playing touches.

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE... How about the 400-watt **Markbass Standard 102HF £619** (22.6kg), with quirky orange speaker cones and a killer tone? Or the 500-watt **Barefaced Retro Two10 £449** (14kg), a sensationally light unit with a big sound? There's also the 500-watt **EBS NeoLine 210 £999** (19kg); it's lightweight and robust, if a little on the pricey side.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Ruggedly built, competitively priced and portable
+ Top-notch clean, expansive sound with plenty of bottom end
+ Tweeter attenuation
- Single side-mounted carry handle a bit inconvenient

A well-designed, well-proportioned cabinet that will ensure you'll be loud and clean for a wide variety of small-to-medium sized gigs

9/10

KEY FEATURES

Hartke HyDrive HCH210 500W

- **PRICE** £442
- **DESCRIPTION** 500W 2x10" bass cabinet, sealed enclosure of birch ply construction with two Hartke HyDrive neodymium 10" speakers, plus a 1" tweeter with attenuation control. Two Speakon and two jack input sockets
- **DIMENSIONS** 371x381x406mm
- **WEIGHT** 17.7kg/39lbs
- **CONTACT** Korg UK 01908 304635 samsontech.com/hartke

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Gibson Memory Cable

Need some 'inspiration insurance'? Cover yourself with a cable that records

PRICE £79 **CONTACT** www.gibson.com

The Memory Cable is a good-quality five-metre instrument cable and you can use it, like any other cable, to connect a guitar or bass to an amp or interface. Plus it has a built-in recording module. It's supplied with a 4GB Micro SD card, which can store up to 15 hours of CD-quality (44.1KhZ/16-bit) audio; you can use bigger cards if you wish. So, theoretically, you'll never miss a particularly sparkling moment of improvisation, killer riff or songwriting idea again. The single AA battery that's required should last for around eight hours.

The plugs are moulded and the recording module is hard wired in. There are just two controls – you can select auto or continuous mode: to record just when you're playing or all the time (good if you're thinking of syncing the parts later). There's an on/off switch, which can also be used to mark something you want to locate easily later; a click closes one file and opens another.

In the long term, the unit will overwrite previous content if it runs out of available storage space – so there's a form of memory fail-safe built in. The unit can handle higher input levels (up to +4dBu), meaning it can also be used with synths or other electronic instruments.

In use

Unlike a looper pedal, which gives you instantaneous playback through your amp, the only way to hear the recordings you've made is on a computer, so you'll need a micro SD card reader – some phones can be used for this too. You can't record and review on the fly effectively, but it's a useful automatic notepad for practice sessions that aren't focused on recording.

The Memory Cable's sound quality is impressive. Used directly between the guitar and an amp, you're getting only the basic signal from the instrument, which enables later reamping. There's also no reason why you can't place the cable after your effects chain or an amp modeller, or even in an effects loop in order to capture a more complete sound – handy for those moments when the effect itself has provided the creative inspiration.

This does, however, introduce a lot of additional cabling into your set-up, which doesn't seem ideal. It's a shame that the module can't simply be unplugged and re-cabled.

In addition, you can connect the Memory Cable to the output of a mixer to use it as a quick mono mixdown tool if you have no other means of capturing a take-home mix to work on. **ML**

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

A novel idea with more uses than you might at first expect. The sound quality is good and files are transferred easily

7/10

Pigtronix Echolution 2 Ultra Pro

Looking for the ultimate delay pedal? This just might be your new best friend

PRICE £499 **E2 REMOTE** £59 **CONTACT** www.pigtronix.com

Once you've swallowed the manual and navigated your way past the slightly scary exterior (six knobs, eight buttons, two footswitches, six banks of multi-segment LEDs, MIDI In/Out and a USB port), the Echolution 2 Ultra Pro proves to be a genuinely awesome tool for manipulating and modulating delays.

As a stereo unit, it can work comfortably in concert with stereo effects or a dual-amp setup. If you're a home recording fan, the combination of sound quality, flexibility and parameter control makes it a great ally. The unit comes loaded with 60 presets to help you explore its potential, and these can be edited and stored. There's also an expression pedal socket, to which you can map any parameter for live control, and every function can be controlled via MIDI. If you want to engage with a computer interface there's a free Mac/PC editor. There's also an additional E2 remote switch that adds extra functionality in the form of Jump (modulates the delay by an octave when you press the switch) and Freeze (looper) modes.

This is a dual multi-tap delay pedal and you can create smooth pitch change effects by altering the delay time. There are four filters: low pass, tape, comb and sweep. Any of the first three can be combined with the sweep filter, and this is modulated by the LFO. There are four LFO waveforms to choose from: sine, square, saw and sample and hold. Any of the filter settings can be run through a bit crusher filter to create distortion and degradation. The delay line can also be turned off to allow the modulation, pitch shifting and filter to be used independently.

In use

There's so much potential here for manipulating and modulating that it's hard to know when to stop tweaking. The interface is surprisingly intuitive given its complexity. The 24-bit sound is impossible to fault and there are a whole range of advanced boot options for enabling MIDI clock in, a 6dB boost, non-pitched MIDI tracking, stereo output phase inversion and more. The Echolution 2 Ultra Pro is more than capable of creating basic, vintage-style echoes and long delays (10ms-10s). It is, though, very expensive, even when compared to some of the big hitters in the delay market, although a quick online search will find street prices far lower than full retail. **ML**

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

This is a hugely powerful effects pedal that will enable you to do pretty well anything with delay. It's not cheap and up against some tough competition, but once you realise the possibilities the investment could well be money well spent

8/10

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Six of the best

Modern acoustic performers need great sound and onboard effects in a portable package. Here's our pick of the best solutions...

Ashdown Woodsman Parlour

PRICE £149 **CONTACT** www.ashdownmusic.com

Ashdown's Woodsman amps are housed in attractive cabinets and combine modern features with prices that won't be beyond the reach of entry-level players. The Parlour is the smallest amp in the range, with an eight-inch Celestion driver and 25-watt mic and guitar channels, each with volume, bass, mid, treble and reverb controls. The feature list is rounded out by phase reverse and feedback-combating notch filters. At 4.25 kilos, it's a lightweight, portable amp for open-mic nights and small gigs at a price that makes it a serious contender.

Laney A1+

PRICE £299 **CONTACT** www.laney.co.uk

The A1+ is a great value-for-money option for the gigging acoustic player. You get two identical instrument or mic channels with EQ sections, phantom power and a separate aux input, all of which can be used simultaneously. Laney says the A1+ has increased headroom from its 80-watt power section and improved frequency response thanks to the high-quality dome tweeter and eight-inch bass driver. There's an anti-feedback section, 16 digital effects types and balanced XLR DI output. The tough tilted-back wedge-shaped 'Kickback' cabinet and built-in pole stand mount make this a versatile onstage performer.

Ashdown's Woodsman amps combine modern features with prices that won't be beyond the reach of entry-level players

Yamaha THR5A

PRICE £144 **CONTACT** www.uk.yamaha.com

Yamaha's THR series amps take space-saving to the next level, and are ideal for the acoustic player who wants to practise and write songs on the move. The THR5A is designed specifically for electro-acoustics and has emulations of different mic types, such as condenser, dynamic and tube, enabling it to recreate a versatile range of steel-string and nylon tones. The effects section covers reverb, chorus and compression and it can double as a dock for your mp3 player or an audio interface, which makes the THR5A a useful tool for recording too.

AER Compact 60 3

PRICE £749 **CONTACT** www.aer-amps.com

This third incarnation of AER's popular little acoustic amp has separate channels for guitar and vocals, meaning it's ideal for singer-songwriters playing smaller venues. Despite weighing just 6.5kg, the Compact 60 packs in an eight-inch twin-cone speaker, delivering a plentiful 60 watts of solid-state tone. Take into account a digital effects processor with two reverbs, delay and chorus and it's easy to see why this has become a go-to choice for acoustic players seeking great sound in a small package.

Fender's handsome-looking new acoustic amps are lightweight, compact combos designed to deliver a clear acoustic sound

Fender Acoustic SFX

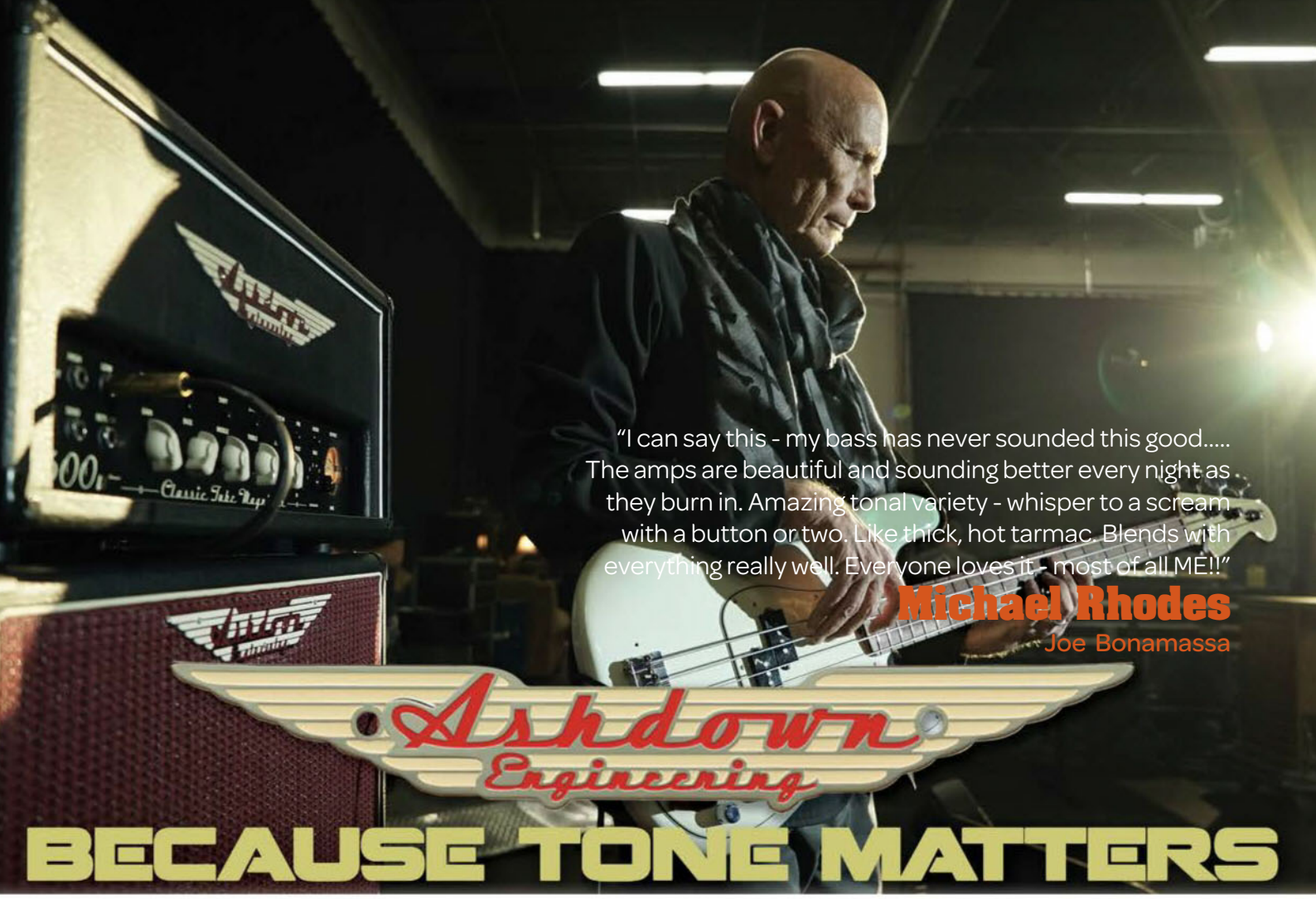
PRICE £565 **CONTACT** www.fender.com

Fender's handsome-looking new acoustic amps are lightweight, compact combos designed to deliver a clear acoustic sound. The SFX has two channels, each with an 80-watt output, and offers Fender's Stereo Field Expansion technology, along with onboard reverb, delay and Vibratone effects. The carry handle also acts as a cradle for mobile devices and there's an aux input, feedback-reducing phase switches, line output and two-button effects bypass footswitch. The smooth wooden exterior, aside from looking a million dollars, is designed to optimise sound projection.

Trace Elliot TA200

PRICE £799 **CONTACT** www.traceelliot.com

The TA200 boasts a highly impressive spec list and crams four five-inch Celestion speakers into a still fairly modest profile that's easy to transport. It throws out 100 watts per channel, giving it the feel of a miniature PA system. The selection of effects is impressive, too, offering stereo chorus, flanger, phaser, tremolo and various delay types, and you get Trace Elliot's Shape circuit and auto-compressor, plus a six-function footswitch. Lo-trim, hi-trim, gain and notch filter controls and six-band graphic EQ make this a must-try selection for any acoustic performer.



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'63 GRETSCH DUO JET

This classic rock 'n' roller beloved of AC/DC's Malcolm Young has a few issues but, as **HUW PRICE** discovers, it's a super-cool vintage model...

Although Roundups, Jet Firebirds and Duo Jets are sometimes referred to as 'solidbody' guitars, they're actually semi-solid designs. This double-cutaway Duo Jet dates from 1963 and is far from mint; in addition to a small area of missing neck binding near the headstock and snapped pickup rings, it has recently undergone a headstock repair. Happily, the luthier did a decent job and the lacquer touch-up matches quite well.

The factory label is glued to the back of the switch cavity cover and the serial number corresponds to 1963, but the model number has been changed from 6129 to 6128. A pen was used to write an 8 over the 9, and although 6128 is correct for a Duo Jet, 6129 was the model number Gretsch used for the Sparkle Jet. The factory had probably run out of 6128 labels. Duo Jets of this era had black lacquer-finished tops and this one shows extensive crazing. The all-important neck angle is good and there's plenty of downward adjustment potential if needed, but the break angle over the pinned bridge is a bit marginal. The neck feels narrow across the fingerboard and tapers from slim-ish at the nut end to fairly clubby at the body joint. The narrowness and full round curve create a slightly bulbous feel and it's not the sort of profile you'd find on a modern guitar. Although it doesn't have the original case, all the original parts are in situ, including the gold-plated Filter'Tron pickups and open gear Grover tuners.

The all-important neck angle is good and there's plenty of downward adjustment potential

In use

Let's get the worst bit out of the way. If you think >

KEY FEATURES

1963 Gretsch Duo Jet

- **SCALE LENGTH** 622 mm/24.5"
- **NECK WIDTH** 41mm at nut, 53mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 19.5mm at first fret, 25mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 35.5mm at nut, 48mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 3.4kg/7.4lbs
- **FINISH** Black
- **CONTACT** Cranes Music 02920 398215 **www.cranes.co.uk**

The recent headstock repair looks decent enough and the original open gear Grover tuners are present

The Duo Jet's lacquer finish exhibits plenty of crazing and no shortage of playing wear

Above left, **Duo Jets from this era feature a zero fret**
Above right, **The Burns vibrato doesn't exactly make for rock-solid tuning stability but otherwise, there's plenty to like here**

the tuning stability of Bigsbys can be wayward, the Burns vibrato on this Duo Jet makes a Bigsby feel as slick as a Floyd Rose. Then again, the plethora of pings emanating from the headstock area suggests that he vibrato unit may not be entirely to blame.

I compared the 60s Filter'Trons to some TV Jones Classics and the experience was not unlike pitting original Gibson PAFs against most modern boutique wannabes. The TV Jones units are very close to the Filter'Trons and sound wonderful in their own right, but the originals are clearer, woodier and more harmonically complex. It's well known that original Filter'Trons weren't wax potted, but TV Jones wax pots his – unless you request otherwise when ordering.

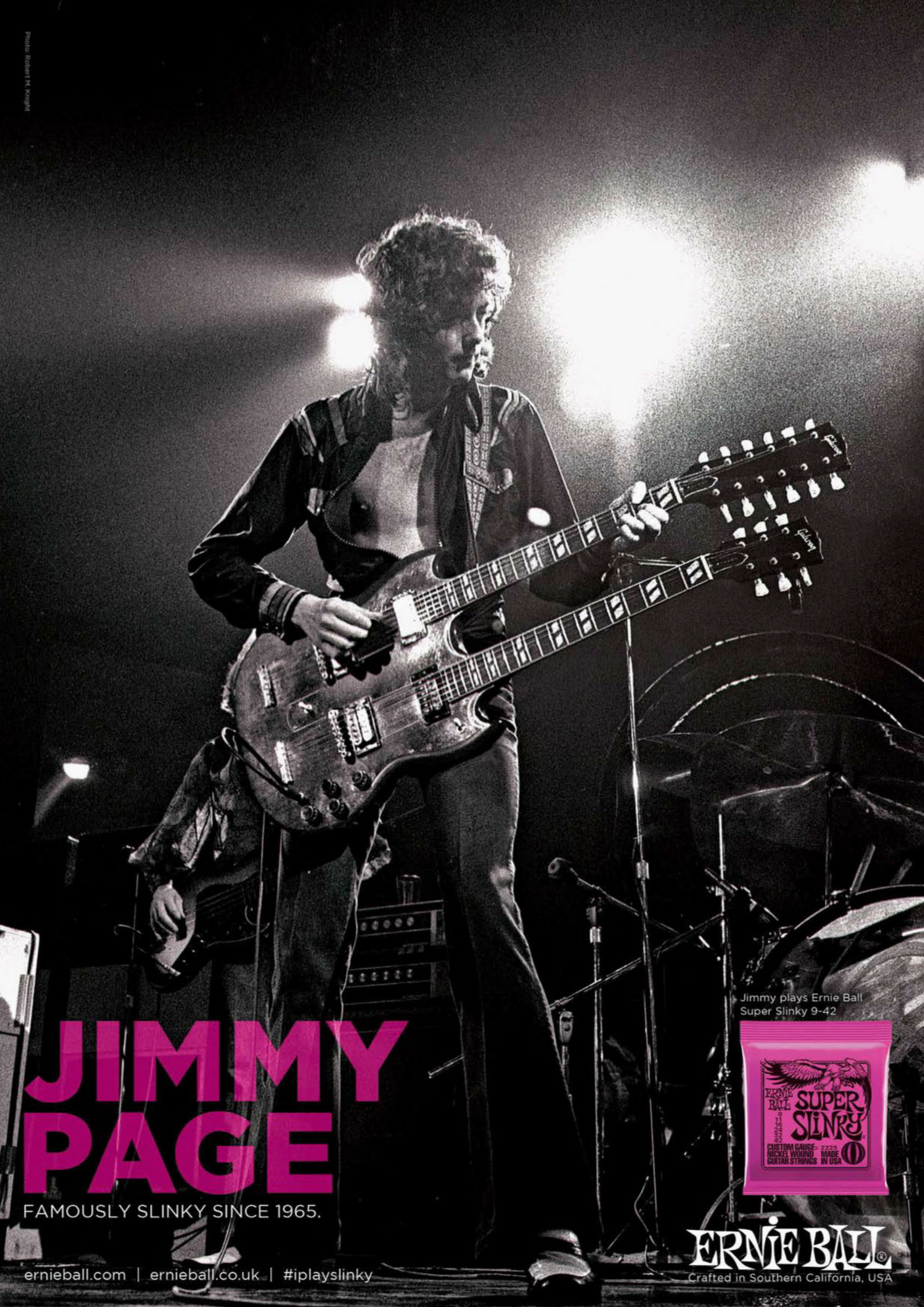
From the front, this looks like a compact and conventional instrument, but holding it creates a different impression. It feels more like a jazz guitar because the body is quite deep and the neck joint is an archtop-type arrangement with a fingerboard extension that floats above the body. Consequently, the bridge sits high, and don't be deceived into thinking that twin cutaways facilitate SG-style access to the upper frets. The heel curve actually starts at the 13th fret.

At first, the Duo Jet may feel ungainly, but getting used to it takes no time at all. Even unplugged, it's a blast to play because the hollow body and general construction style make it sound and feel like a compact archtop acoustic. Perhaps Malcolm Young opted to leave the neck pickup out of his Duo Jet because the void acted as a soundhole!

From the front, this looks like a compact instrument, but holding it creates a different impression

Rather than use tone controls, Gretsch opted for a tone switch with two preset levels of treble roll-off. Implemented properly, it's a perfectly viable feature, but arguably Gretsch got it wrong from the get-go then ran with it for years. Essentially, the capacitor values are unsuitable, so unless you're in the middle bypass position the two options can be described as 'unusable' and 'even worse'. Gretsch switched to more suitable values a few years ago, but this Duo Jet still has its original capacitors. Good to see but bad to use.

Vintage Filter'Tron humbuckers have relatively low output levels. The bridge and neck pickups on >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Above **Some extra attention, possibly taking the Burns vibrato unit out of the equation, would be required to make this guitar gig-ready**

this Duo Jet ohm are a vintage-correct 3.85k and 4k ohms respectively, so you will need to turn up your amp a tad higher than usual.

The tone is unique: part P-90 snarl, part Tele twang and part jazzbox clarity, coupled with outstanding touch response, a hint of trebly jangle and real complexity. If you like to thumb pick, simply stick the selector in the middle position and gratification will be instant.

So much for clean mode; when you crank up your amp or activate an overdrive, the Duo Jet roars. You get huge-sounding powerchords and grinding riffs with a layer of chime that allows chord voicings, subtle inversions and hammer-ons to scythe straight through the dirt.

Sustain in the conventional sense doesn't really enter into the equation, and the slightly percussive response is why the Duo Jet is such a stellar rock 'n' roll rhythm instrument. However, it also feeds back in the sweetest and most controllable manner, so you can get sustain but you have to do some work in order to find the sweet spots.

The tone is unique – part P-90 snarl, part Tele twang and part jazzbox clarity with outstanding touch response

Despite a really nice setup, with low action and unexpectedly accurate intonation, some extra work would be required to make this a stage-worthy guitar. Peering closely at the vibrato, there appears to be an adjustment screw that would allow you to lock it off. Assuming string stretching and friction point lubrication fails, I'd be inclined to disable the Burns. The tone capacitors could be replaced and I'd maybe swap the pickups to put the hotter one at the bridge. I'd also lower the polepiece screws and shim both pickups to get them closer to the strings. There's enough fingerboard width to use the bridge as intended and widen the string spacing, too.

At first, this Gretsch didn't really grab me, but playing it for a while changed my mind and I really fell for it. It's far from collector's grade and there are issues, so to play and sound its best a few sympathetic tweaks would be in order. But overall there's genuine potential to turn this into a gig-able vintage guitar with sonic quality and tuning stability to match its super-cool looks.

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HAPPY ANNIVERSARY

Lars Mullen meets Gary Davies, a man so enchanted by Fender's Anniversary guitars that he resolved to write a book about them...

Ever felt confused by the wealth of cool Fender Anniversary models? Gary Davies was, so he decided to write a book on the subject.

"I decided to write a book to clarify the frequent confusion over the identification of Fender's Anniversary model Strats," says Gary, "and, to date, I've sourced information on around 70 genuine USA-built Anniversary Stratocasters."

Since Davies began working on the book, he's interviewed some major names, past and present, at Fender, along with guitarists and collectors.

"But it's not healthy for my wallet," he laughs. "On a few occasions whilst interviewing other collectors, I've persuaded the owner of the guitar we are talking about to sell it to me. The quality of these celebratory models is stunning, so I've had to have one or two, as they're available only in limited numbers.

"It all started when I bought a limited edition 40th Anniversary Strat launched in '94, of which 1,954 were built, paying homage to the year in which the Strat was born. The fact that Peter Green's signature was on the scratchplate was an attraction, but I soon realised that this was a really cool guitar that had it all: two-tone sunburst, nitrocellulose finish, maple neck and single-ply scratchplate; it played beautifully and sounded wonderful, and came complete with the original case candy, 40th Anniversary hardshell case, plus a replica of the original-shaped 'Poodle' case.

"I heard from a friend who said he had the same model, so knowing that the standard Strats from '94 are often confused with limited-edition models, I thought I must take a look at his Anniversary Strat. As soon as I saw the rosewood fingerboard, I knew what he had. Sure, it was a '94 Strat, but like all factory-built Strats from that year, it carried a neck plate inscribed with *Stratocaster 40 Years... and still rockin'*.

"It all started when I bought a limited edition 40th Anniversary Strat launched in 1994"

"Sourcing material and information has proved tremendously exciting, spending many hours discussing the specification and detail on these special guitars. Whilst I feel the '94 Anniversary Strat is one of the finest factory-built Strats ever made, Strat aficionados will be aware that the headstock profile, pickup covers and control knobs aren't as accurate for the period, as found on my >

Above **Gary playing an Aqua Marine Metallic American Standard Telecaster**
Opposite top **Gary with part of his enviable collection of Fender Strats and Teles**
Bottom left **2015 Custom Shop Mary Kay Relic (left), Crafted In Japan Antigua Strat**
Bottom right **Gold ring with Custom Shop logo**
Above right **40th Anniversary Stratocaster Diamond Dealer scratchplate detail**

1954
40th Anniversary Stratocaster
1994
VOLUME

Above left **Korean-built Fender Showmaster (left), Fender short scale Pawn Shop Mustang Special**
Above right **Gretsch BST 1500 (left), 1960s Teisco Zenon**

2014 60th Anniversary model. The 2014 version has the correct headstock shape, rounded pickup covers and short skirt control knobs. A few owners of this latest '54 replica have spotted a crack or two in the control knobs; it's a result of Fender making a sterling effort for authenticity by researching the original properties of the plastics used back in the day, therefore making this 60th model as historically accurate as possible.

"Let's just go back to '94, when the Fender Custom Shop also played a part in the same celebration. I have a fine example of the 40th Anniversary Stratocaster Diamond Dealer model, which was launched in January '94 and limited to a run of 150. Along with the Playboy Marilyn Monroe Strat and the chrome Harley-Davidson Strat, it's from the Fender Diamond Dealer Limited Edition Series. John Page, who managed the Fender Custom Shop back in the day, always made the point that while these instruments may look ornamental, they were all built to play and sound great.

"I certainly won't be gigging this one, it's a stunning guitar, and has all the goodies, including a lightweight ash body with a two-piece book matched highly flamed maple top, figured neck and fingerboard, custom 50s pickups and gold hardware, including the hand-engraved scratchplate designed by Pamelina H. It was complete with all the accessories, which included a gold ring incorporating the 'V'-style Custom Shop logo inset with a diamond, which unlike so many vibrato arms, I'm making sure doesn't get lost.

"For the 50th birthday, Fender made an Anniversary American Deluxe with S-1 switching, three Samarium Cobalt Noiseless Strat pickups and gold hardware. My example was literally an 'under the bed' find in mint condition, with the wrapping still on the scratchplate. I've got a 2015 Custom Shop Mary Kay Relic celebrating 20 years since Fender introduced the first Relic guitars at the NAMM show in '95. Three key guys kept it secret, they just put it in a glass case, and all the dealers thought it was an original '56. I've interviewed some high-profile Fender employees who recall that when the dealers found out, the order books were rammed. I'm not too worried about casually playing this one, as it already wears an authentic ragged coat, which really has been thought through, rather than just aimlessly wearing areas on the body contours."

"I'm also smitten by the quality of some of the Anniversary Telecasters. I have two at the moment"

It's not all high-end Strats in Gary's collection, however – there's the odd drool-worthy Tele, too.

"I'm also smitten by the quality and appearance of some of the Anniversary Telecasters, I have two here at the moment," he says. "There's a USA factory-built 50th Anniversary 1998 Collectors Edition Telecaster. It actually looks like a Custom Shop guitar, the finish is that good, and it >

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(Left to right) 40th Anniversary Strat, Anniversary model with darker fingerboard, two 2014 60th Anniversary models

Inlay detail from 50th Anniversary 1998 Collectors Edition Telecaster

Gibson Les Paul Studio in Worn Brown (left), 1975 Guild S-100

Japanese-built Levinson Blade Texas Classic (left), Cherry Burst S-type guitar made by De Railer

Close-up of 40th Anniversary Diamond Dealer Strat's 1954-1994 inlay at the 12th fret

Four 'partscaster' S-types built from Warmouth and Mighty Mite parts

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Above left **Custom Shop 40th Anniversary Telecaster (left), Collectors Edition 40th Anniversary Stratocaster Diamond Dealer Strat**
Above right **Shergold Meteor (left), Mexican Fender 1972 Thinline Tele**

complements the gold hardware. But the jewel in the crown is a Custom Shop 40th Anniversary Telecaster Collectors Edition with a beautiful Honey Violin Transparent finish on a lightweight Louisiana ash body with a highly figured one-piece maple neck. The scratchplate is a bit special, with a striking grained-Ivoroid finish.

"Fred Stuart had a hand in the design; he was one of the first Masterbuilders, he spent 15 years at Fender and like his colleagues has been really helpful providing information for my book. Only 300 were produced in either Honey Violin Transparent, Tinted Natural or Translucent Red, with gold hardware. The bridge saddles are notorious for shedding the gold plate to produce what has been coined the 'Rolex look'. So that Tele is pretty rare, dating from '89 and therefore one of the first limited-edition runs produced by the Custom Shop, which opened in '87. I acquired this one in a way familiar to so many collectors... the apprehensive motorway service station deal," he laughs.

"I don't have a giant frame, so a Tele is just right for me. I played a friend's Gibson 335 recently, and it just felt too cumbersome and I didn't feel comfortable with it. This American Standard Tele from 2001, in Aqua Marine Metallic, is simple, uncomplicated and suits me just fine. It also holds a lot of sentimental value, as I bought it with the modest inheritance I received from my mum, so it'll be a keeper forever. I have several other Strats and S-types, including a nice Crafted In Japan Antigua Strat and a Cherry Burst model from De Railer with a really fast neck, and there's a Japanese-built Levinson Blade Texas Classic, which plays beautifully, whilst my Korean-built Fender Showmaster, loaded with a pair of Seymour Duncan humbuckers, is a real rocker."

When it comes to what Davies adds to his collection, simplicity is important, as he explains: "My Shergold Meteor was one of the first built by the iconic British company in 1975. I love the simple layout, you wouldn't think there were so many sounds locked up in this one, it's in superb condition, whilst my Guild S-100 dating from '75 has been in a few battles over the years and the nitro finish on the headstock has a lot of cracking, but none of these issues detract from the look and playability.

"I tend to buy instruments that have a nostalgic appeal. I go for quality, rarity and affordability"

"My late 70s Gretsch BST 1500 is another fine example; it's one of those one-size-fits-all guitars, whilst a Gibson Victory MVX from the early 80s is the most versatile guitar I have. I've been selective with the 'played-in' guitars I've bought. I tend to buy instruments that have a nostalgic appeal, which are likely to retain their value. As there are a lot of Fender Anniversary models to choose from, I go for quality, rarity and affordability."

If you have any information that could help Gary with his book, email gary@garydavies.com

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Gibson ES-175D Sunburst, 1979, one owner, tags, case, good condition. £1,995. 07593 398272 or email roger_gill@btinternet.com. West Mids

Gibson ES-339 Custom Shop. 2010. Antique Red, 50s neck, cream binding, home use only, mint condition, Gibson Custom Shop hardcase. Pictures available. £1,350. Call 07958 339500 or email paulc8@ hotmail.com (Worthing)

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- Produces the most consistent tonal balance with little volume drop-off over distance

Price shown with B1 Bass bin and T1 ToneMatch.

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All about... Attenuators

All amps have sweet spots where they sound best, but it's not always possible to crank them up to gig-level volume. That's where attenuators come in. **HUW PRICE** explains...

It took electric guitarists a very long time to warm to the idea of attenuation. It's debatable whether the attitude change can be attributed to engineers continually telling us to turn down, increasing deafness and tinnitus, or the gradual realisation that cranking up 100-watt heads at pub gigs is no longer deemed acceptable by the general public.

Attenuators are generally used to make loud and powerful valve amplifiers quieter. Turning down the volume of a guitar amp achieves the same effect but changes the sound and dynamics too. Some would suggest using lower-power amps instead, but if you prefer the tone of a flat-out JCM800 or tweed Bassman, 18-watt Marshalls and 5E3 Deluxes won't deliver the goods.

If you always want to hit your amp's sweet spot but sometimes need to play at lower volume levels for smaller gigs or home practice, you'll have to place an attenuation device between the amplifier's output and the speaker. There are various types of external attenuator, but generally speaking they transform excess electrical energy into heat or mechanical energy.

Tone changes

In an ideal world, attenuators would allow you to use any amp at any volume level without any adverse effect on sound quality or reliability. In practice, the use of attenuation does change tone, but blaming the attenuator isn't always justified.

Our perceptions of toppiness and bassiness change depending on volume level. So changes in tone that we may perceive when the amp signal is attenuated may not be a characteristic of the attenuator but rather a function of volume and the way human hearing works. This is why some attenuators provide bass and treble compensation. If you want to research this, search online for Fletcher-Munson curves and equal loudness contours.

Reliability

Getting back to the reliability issue, attenuators have sometimes been blamed for amplifier failures. While this may be justified in some cases, it's also worth remembering that attenuators allow us to run amplifiers flat out for extended periods of time. Let's use a car analogy and consider which would last longer – the car that's driven carefully and rarely exceeds the speed limit, or the car that's driven flat out all the time.

The point is you can expect your valves and components to fail sooner if you continually use your amp at or near its limits. You might also consider it worth having your amp serviced thoroughly to give it the best chance of survival before you begin using an attenuator.

Matching up

Impedance matching is also important for reliability. Just as an output transformer with an 8-ohm output impedance needs to be connected to an 8-ohm speaker, that same transformer will need to see an 8-ohm load from any attenuator.

It's also vital to ensure that the power rating of an attenuator is adequate for the amplifier power rating. You wouldn't connect a 30-watt speaker to a 100-watt amplifier, and attenuators are no different. Always check the specs and remember that the peak power of an amp always exceeds its stated power. So you can expect a 100-watt amp to blow up a 100-watt attenuator.

Lastly, ensure you use speaker cable to make connections between the amplifier and the attenuator, and the attenuator and the speakers. External attenuators can be active or passive and both can be reactive or non reactive.

Passive attenuators

This type does not require an external power supply. Most feature networks of high-power resistors, and purely resistive attenuators are sometimes referred to as power soaks. Some passive attenuators incorporate fans or bulbs that are powered by the amplifier signal.

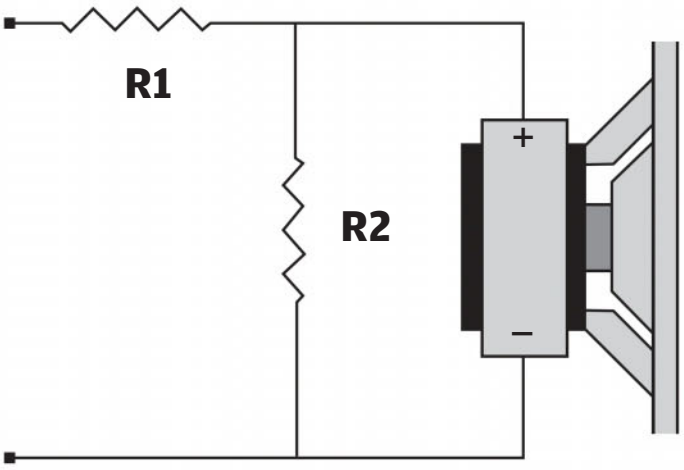
Passive attenuators can also be made using step down transformers with multi-taps for various output levels. This method relies on changing the impedance the power valves 'see', and some of the power travels back to the amplifier. As more attenuation is applied, the amp's frequency response can change, and there are reports of damage being caused to amplifier transformers with transformer-loaded attenuators.

Active attenuators

These attenuators require external power because they incorporate an amplifier stage. The signal from the guitar amp 'sees' a passive dummy load and a small part of the amp signal is then fed to an onboard amplifier that feeds the speakers. The Bad Cat Unleash and Fryette Power Station are good examples.

The big advantage of active attenuators is that they can be used to boost as well as cut the signal being sent to the speakers.

The big advantage of active attenuators is they can be used to boost as well as cut the signal



Most switchable passive attenuators are based on a simple two-resistor circuit, known as the L-pad. Resistors R1 and R2 dissipate excess electrical energy as heat and the values can be adjusted to achieve various levels of attenuation while maintaining a constant load for the amplifier output. Alternatively, L-Pads with rotary controls are available with various impedance and power ratings. These are also used in commercially manufactured attenuators and allow continually variable control.

POWER SCALING AND ATTENUATION

Although they are intended to achieve the same result – namely reducing level without compromising tone or dynamics – the methodologies are quite different. In a nutshell, power scaling works by varying the B+ voltage inside the amp. Unlike using a variac, this allows the full heater voltage to be maintained at all settings.

Power scaling can be applied throughout the amp, so all the valves produce less power. Alternatively, it can just be applied to the power valves, but a master volume control may be required to prevent the preamp from driving the power stage too hard. Many amp builders are now using power scaling, and a big advantage over using external attenuators is that the life of the valves might be extended rather than reduced.

So, in addition to taming high-power amps, they can increase the volume level of small and medium-power valve amps, turning them into viable and versatile gigging tools.

Non-reactive loads

Passive resistor networks fulfil two functions. They present the amp with a resistive load with the same rating as the speaker and they convert electrical energy into heat. Although a resistor and a speaker may both be labelled 4, 8 or 16-ohm, the speaker's rating is only nominal because it is not constant across the frequency range. This is why we refer to speaker 'impedance' rather than 'resistance', even though ohms are used for both.

In contrast, the value of the resistor remains constant regardless of the frequency content of the signal. So purely resistive attenuators are both passive and non-reactive. This is why some players find simple resistive attenuators adversely effect dynamic feel and tone.

The relationship between the output of an amp and the ever-shifting impedance of a speaker is complex and it contributes to the playing experience. If you remove the reactive element from the equation (ie, the speaker) your amp and cab will no longer interact in the same way.

Reactive loads

In reactive circuits, there is usually some combination of resistance, inductance and capacitance. Guitar circuits are an obvious example because pickups are both resistive and inductive, and there is always capacitance in a guitar cable. This is one reason why pickup DC readings, like speaker impedance ratings, can be relied upon only up to a point.

There are various ways to make a reactive attenuator. The easiest is to connect resistors in series and parallel with the speaker in order to preserve some of the speaker's reactive qualities. Weber MASS attenuators have coneless speaker frames. The voice coil is retained, so it converts electrical energy into mechanical energy, but is essentially a silent speaker. Dummy speaker drawbacks are that the energy conversion is less efficient, so the dummy speaker dissipates more energy as heat – much like a non-reactive resistor – and the absence of a cone means the reactance is slightly different to that of a conventional speaker. Instead, an electrical fan or lightbulbs can be used to add reactance to resistive load attenuators, and since they are powered by the amp signal, such devices can still be called passive.

Speaker efficiency has a big effect on volume, so it's possible to achieve attenuation simply by using less efficient speakers. Repeatedly changing speakers isn't viable, but adjusting the flux density of the magnet is. Impedance and power handling are unchanged, but lower flux density makes the speaker less efficient and quieter.

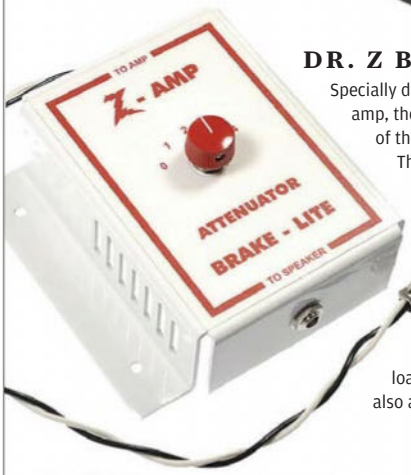
BUYER'S GUIDE

When choosing your attenuator, you must consider power handling and impedance – as mentioned earlier in the piece. Also decide whether a stepped attenuator control with preset increments will be OK for you, or if you'd prefer the finer range of a continually adjustable control. Other potentially useful features may include equalisation controls and impedance switching. Dummy load switching will safely silence your amp and the direct output can be routed to a power amp for re-amping.

EMINENCE REIGNMAKER FDM

£159

US manufacturer Eminence offers two speakers with flux density modulation. The Reignmaker is the British-voiced model and the Maverick is voiced for American tones. Available in 8- or 16-ohm impedance with 75-watt power handling, you can adjust the attenuation level by turning the rotary control at the back of the speaker itself.



DR. Z BRAKE-LITE £180

Specially designed to mount inside a combo amp, the unit is attached to an inside wall of the cabinet using two fixing screws. There are fixed wires and a jack to plug into the speaker out of the amp and a jack socket where you can plug in your speakers. It works with valve amps up to 45 watts and can be used with 4, 8, or 16-ohm loads. A standalone version is also available.

WEBER MASS 100W $257

Loaded with a 'silent speaker', Weber's most robust attenuator has a main volume knob and three-position treble compensation switch. The line out has a bypassable three-band tone stack and separate volume control. Impedance options are 2, 4, 8 and 16 ohms and the attenuation is continuously adjustable from -3dB to over -70db. It can also be used as a dummy load and there's an attenuation bypass switch.

BAD CAT UNLEASH

£349

This is one of those new-fangled active attenuators with a built-in 100-watt Class D solid state amp. It's small and light enough to throw in a pedal bag, two switchable level presets, direct out and an effects loop. This little beauty will make loud amps quieter and low-powered amps much louder.

Chord Clinic

So far, we've looked at adding interesting notes to chords – suspended seconds and fourths, sevenths and added ninths. Here, **ROD FOGG** moves on to altering the bass note of a chord to something other than the root

We call it the root position when the root note, or name note of the chord, is in the bass – in other words, when it's the lowest note of the chord. If some other note of the chord is in the bass, we say the chord is inverted. In fact, pretty much any note can be placed underneath any chord in modern music; it doesn't have to be a note that belongs in the chord. Either way, we write the main chord in the usual way but add a forward slash and the bass note. As a result, these chords are known collectively as slash chords.

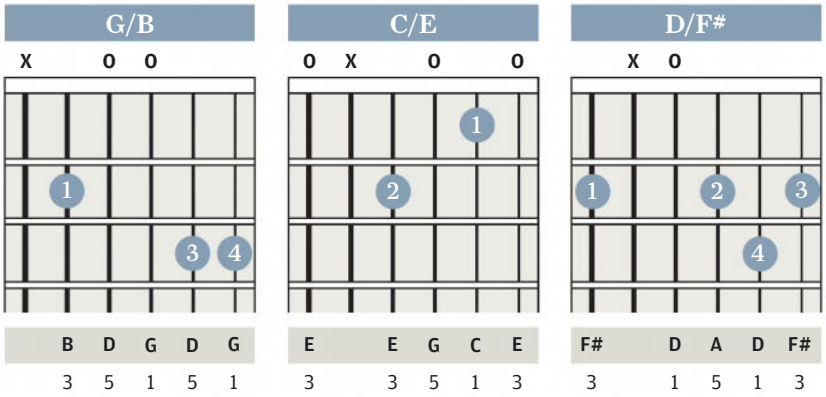
This kind of chord can be strummed but you have to be accurate with the pick – try picking the bass note first and then strumming the upper notes of the chord. It might be better to put the pick down and play them all fingerstyle, using your thumb on the bass note and picking out an arpeggio pattern with the fingers.

Figure 1 introduces G/B, C/E and D/F#. Technically, these are all first inversions as the third of the chord is in the bass. All three sound good without the note that's on the top E string, it's only in the diagram for the sake of completeness. To hear them working in context, you need to try playing one bar each of: C G/B Am G F C/E F G, which is reminiscent of Ralph McTell's *Streets of London*, *Pachelbel's Canon* and one or two others. Its main feature is the stepwise movement of the bassline, and I'm assuming you can find good versions of the root position chords for yourself in this and the coming progressions. To make use of the D/F# try this: D D/F# G A.

This is similar to the opening verse of Ed Sheeran's *Thinking Out Loud*. For the G and A chords, it will sound good if you confine your picking to the root note and the D, G and B strings.

Figure 2 takes a look at some alternatives to the first chord sequence in figure 1, and also introduces the idea that the bass note does not have to be a note from the chord. Use C/B instead of G/B, C/A instead of Am, and C/G instead of G, then carry on as before. C/G is a C major chord with the fifth in the bass, which makes it a second inversion. The difference in the two progressions is subtle, but staying on the C chord while the bassline moves makes the arrival on F in bar five seem more important. Try it for yourself and see what you think.

London calling (Fig 1)



Alternative bass notes (Fig 2)

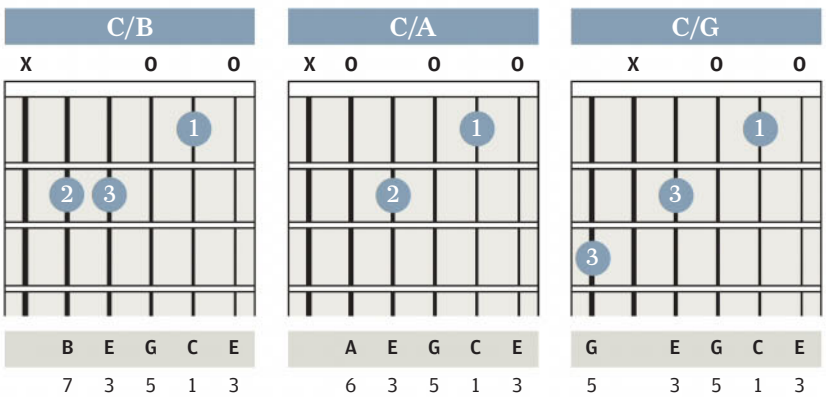


Figure 3 switches to the key of A minor; if you play the four chords in sequence, it's evocative of the opening to one of George Harrison's finest songs – *While My Guitar Gently Weeps*. Follow these four chords with Am, G, D and E. Then play them again, followed by Am, G, C and E.

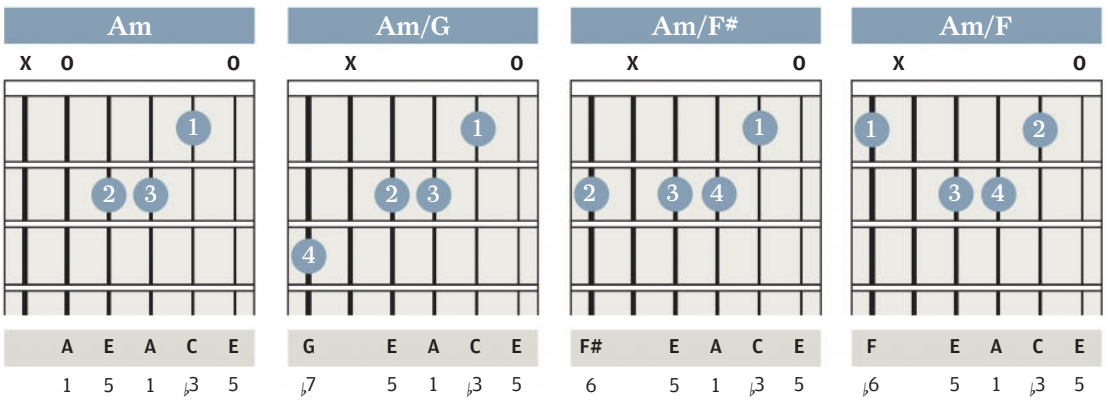
Slash chords can throw up some interesting anomalies. For example, Am/F# is the same as F#m7b5, and Am/F is the same as Fmaj7. Both would be technically correct, but the slash chord notation somehow gets to the heart of what's really going on in the music, and for this writer is preferable in this case.

Figure 4, on the following page, takes this sequence to the key of D minor. It's worth tracking down the Beatles' *Anthology* version of *While My Guitar*... for inspiration. Harrison played these chords with a capo at the fifth fret on his solo version. Can you transpose the rest of the chords in our A minor progressions to this new key? They are C, G, A the first time and C, F, A the second time.

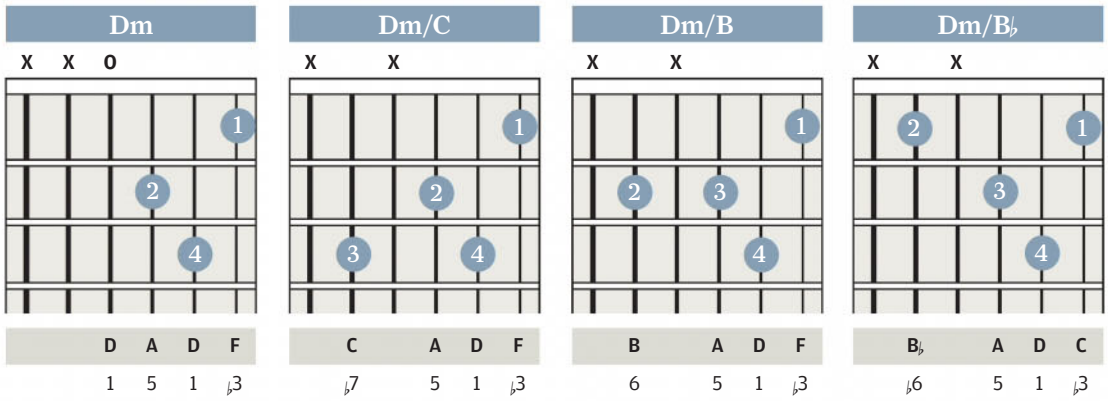
In figure 5, we have a similar moving bassline, this time under a D major chord. You could try D/B♭ as an option for the fourth chord, but in this case we've gone for plain B♭ major, being inspired by Christina Aguilera's *Beautiful*. The original uses the piano, but with fingerstyle arpeggios and a capo on the first fret you can do something in a similar vein on the guitar. Try adding in an open E string at the top of your B♭ chord arpeggio. D/C could be described as D7 in third inversion, which means the seventh is in the bass. Also notice that D/B is the same as Bm7, but again the slash chord notation seems to reveal more of what this chord sequence is about.

I hope these examples have whetted your appetite for some experimentation in the world of slash chords. Onwards and upwards? With all these descending basslines, I think it's a case of onwards and downwards... >

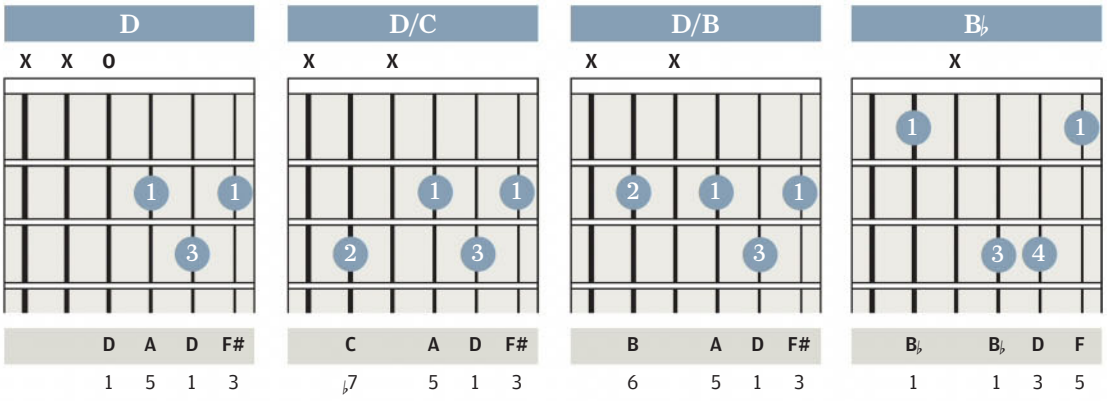
A minor move (Fig 3)



If the capo fits... (Fig 4)



Beautiful day (Fig 5)



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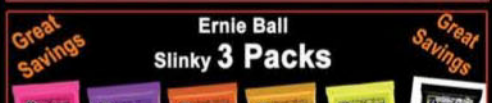

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Fretbuzz

Your letters. This month: A remarkable recovery, Acoustic amps, Micro-Frets, heavy relicing and buying local

LETTER OF THE MONTH

The road to recovery

Hi Chris and the team, interesting issue [*G&B* January] and the Richard Hawley feature in particular, which having partly recovered from a total neck-down paralysis myself, I found very interesting. I sustained a spinal cord injury after falling headlong down just four stairs carrying a small bass bin nearly three years ago (after a Boxing Day gig). I ended up in hospital unable to move anything but my head, and with excruciating pain everywhere else. I couldn't even tell where the electric shock-like pain was – it was just 'everywhere'. I had no idea where my arms or feet were. It was not fun. After this, four months in hospital, learning to stand again, feed myself again… pretty much everything, as my movement returned – to a degree anyway.

I still don't walk well, take a lot of painkillers, and can't reach above my head. Lifting a guitar from a stand is still difficult and requires my own 'special' method! I had to sell nearly all of my gear, just to keep myself and my partner going. She had a 60-mile round trip to visit me daily, she was brilliant. On one occasion, she brought my uke in for me, to see if I could start to play again. I was experiencing a lot of hyper-sensitivity in my hands and fingers – brushing against a bedsheet, or even the feel of wind on my arms, was very painful. The uke was just about OK, although my coordination had gone – as had my calluses and vibrato, which over the years I'd worked so hard to obtain. Next, she brought in my remaining guitar, an Ibanez AS70. I couldn't bear the touch of the strings on my fingertips – and was devastated. I have to say that was the low point; when the consultant had asked me what I most hoped to regain in my recovery, with no hesitation I'd replied "to play guitar again". Not to walk, not to perform live again, just to play, and now it seemed I wouldn't be able to…

However, wind on three years and with the aid of a wonderful NHS physio and a load of painkillers I now have an album of 12 original pieces written since my accident, recorded at home on a Mac paid for by friends who'd arranged fundraisers for me. A small crowdfund paid for CD manufacture and getting it onto iTunes, available now at http://itun.es/gb/Fi069. I've a lot to be thankful for. I can play adequately, my wonderful lady is still with me, I've amazing friends and am content. Money is tight, of course – benefits aren't so hot and we're now both disabled. Next year should see me resume occasional live duties with The Criminal Penguins – myself and two great guys who have hung around for me to be ready, despite the drummer Kevin having a heart attack in this past year. I'll be perched on a stool to play, and have a nice ES-339, Les Paul Junior Special from 1995 and a JTM45 to work with!

Paul Needs, via email

Guitar & Bass LETTER OF THE MONTH

WRITTEN A LETTER OF THE MONTH?

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ORANGE AMPLIFICATION

Good Acoustics

Firstly, thanks for a great magazine. I have been a subscriber for some years now and look forward eagerly to it popping through the letterbox each month. I really enjoy the classic guitar and amp articles you do and have been waiting for articles on a couple of makes.

A friend of mine some years ago was a roadie for Steve Winwood and Traffic, and he told me they raved about Acoustic amplification, but I haven't heard anything about this brand for years. Is it still manufactured?

Another brand I would be interested in hearing about is Micro-Frets guitars. A good pal who used to play guitar in my band some years ago played one and it had a very distinctive tone. I think Carl Perkins may also have used one (he didn't play in my band). Look forward to hearing from you.

David Jones, via email

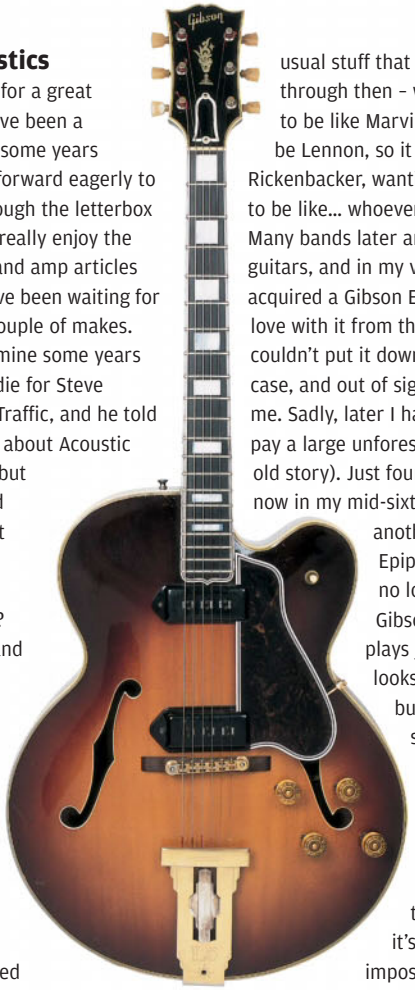
G&B Thanks David. The Acoustic amp brand appears still to exist (acousticamplification.com) and there's a lot of information about Micro-Frets guitars over at www.toneshed.com

Falling in love again…

After a long lay-off (10 years), I've returned to the guitar. I started playing in the late 50s at the age of eight and struggled on an old cheap classical guitar whose action left an awful lot to be desired, until at the age of 10 my father (no longer with us) traded the classical in for, I kid you not, a Gibson L-5 for the princely sum of £12. It makes me weep now to think of it, as it was later sold for a tenner! I went through all the usual stuff that all of us went through then – wanting a Strat to be like Marvin, wanting to be Lennon, so it was a Rickenbacker, wanting a Les Paul to be like… whoever at the time. Many bands later and many, many guitars, and in my very late 40s I acquired a Gibson ES-175. I fell in love with it from the word go. I couldn't put it down; even in its case, and out of sight, it called to me. Sadly, later I had to sell it to pay a large unforeseen bill (the old story). Just four months ago, now in my mid-sixties, I bought another ES-175, an Epiphone. I could no longer afford a Gibson, but the Epi plays just as good, looks gorgeous (the build quality is superb) and once again I can't put it down. The point I want to make is that these days it's practically impossible to buy a 'bad' new guitar. I want to thank you all at *Guitar & Bass*. It was picking up your mag in Smiths that fired up the old passion. My sights are now on an Epiphone Dot 335. Ps, how about an article on one of my guitar heroes – Amos Garrett?

Brian Mullins, Argyll, Scotland

G&B Thanks Brian, if we're inspiring people to pick up the guitar then we must be doing something right!



Heavy relics

Yesterday morning an unexpected little Christmas present from *Guitar & Bass* popped through my letterbox… the 2016 Fender calendar. I've always been a fan of the big 'F', especially the Stratocaster, of which several pristine examples adorn my walls. Looking at the Heavy Relics on the calendar's cover and having read that the Fender Custom Shop has based its distress patterns on actual

Even when it's as convincing as on this Fender Custom Shop Journeyman Relic, faux ageing is still a divisive issue

guitars, I got to wondering just who might subject their instruments to such 'abuse'. So I did a little research and came up with some surprising, hitherto unpublished info...

Apparently, back in the mid-50s/early 60s, there was a rather secretive 'brotherhood' of Fender-playing, chain mail-wearing coal miners. Bizarre though it seems, they used to dash home from the pit, slip into a shirt of chain mail and pound away on those maple fretboards with their unwashed mitts. They became so lost in their music and the punishment they were giving their guitars that they failed to notice that their cats (similarly entranced) were ecstatically using their owners' tweed Fender amps as scratching posts! Original instruments displaying these phenomena are now highly prized, but this is probably the first time that their source has been revealed.

Seriously, though, thanks for the calendar and for giving us all a great guitar magazine to read throughout 2015. Do keep it up for 2016!

Stephen Davies, via email

***G&B** Good work Stephen – you'll see from our interview on p26 that a certain Mr Gruhn is also amused by the notion of aged finishes...*

Are you local?

I've been buying and playing guitars for over 40 years, starting with cheap Japanese copies through to fairly high-end gear. I have bought some from local shops in Newcastle, some from other players locally and some via mail order from shops up and down the country – including a particularly nice 1968 Gibson Les Paul Goldtop bought from the old Music Ground shop in Doncaster in 1978.

A couple of years ago, having experienced some annoying problems with a couple of guitars, I went to the bother of having a local repair guy fix them and set them up better to suit my personal taste/needs. I was very happy with the results. Earlier this year, I bought a quality Custom Shop Strat from a shop further down the country, as I was passing through the area and had seen the guitar on the shop's website. While it was very much the guitar I was after, on getting the guitar home I found that the setup was not to my taste, so I gave it to my local guy to do the works and again he has delivered in spades.

The experience brought to mind some very forceful advice that I was given years ago by Sting's old Last Exit drummer, that the advantage of buying locally is that you can sometimes get the shop to set a guitar up to suit you, and you have the advantage of being able to take a guitar back if you're not entirely happy with it – much more difficult if the shop is 150+ miles away.

I have nothing against buying stuff via mail order, but I can see the advantages of developing a relationship with your local shop. I'd also urge all of your readers to get to know where your local, quality repair people are, as sometimes just a little bit of tweaking can be enough to turn your merely adequate guitar into the bee's knees.

Patrick Kilgallon, Newcastle

HAVE YOUR SAY! Write to us via snail mail, *Guitar & Bass, Anthem Publishing, Suite 6 Piccadilly House, London Road, Bath BA1 6PL* or email **guitarandbass@anthem-publishing.com.** Alternatively get in touch via social media on Facebook or Twitter.

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• Foals • Status Quo •

FEATURED

Jan Akkerman's Les Paul under the microscope
And more...

VOL 27 NO 6
ON SALE
05 FEB

•Contents are subject to change

New music

We round up and rate a selection of this month's guitar-driven album releases and reissues

Daughter

NOT TO DISAPPEAR

No difficult second album here, as Daughter follow up 2013's excellent *If You Leave* with an arguably more complete, certainly more expansive release. Right from the moment the hushed trip-hop opening of the title track explodes into gloriously epic territories, this is a stridant statement. Vast walls of guitar bathed in fuzz and delay, smartly voiced chords, atmospheric swells and hooks a-plenty underline Igor Haefeli's position as one of indie music's most talented guitarists. *Doing The Right Thing* is built around a tremendous octave riff, and *How* features some wonderfully widescreen playing and a euphoric duel between guitar and piano riffs. Inventive drum patterns, with huge meaty toms, and cleverly used electronica decorate a mix that veers between soaring post-rock grandeur and singer Elena Tonra's sparse and morose revelations. **GW**

9/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *The XX, Mogwai*

SIMO

LET LOVE SHOW THE WAY

Nashville trio SIMO's latest release *Let Love Show The Way* is a hippy romp that captures the rock, blues and soul of founder, singer and guitarist JD Simo. Recorded in just two days at the Big House – home of the Allman Brothers Band during the late 1960s/early 1970s – SIMO rip through 10 soulful tracks, plus three bonus tunes. Raw and brimming with mojo, it's an album where extended jams have morphed into earthy songs from a bygone era. *Stranger Blues* sets the tone with a 1960s groove penned the day before the band started recording. *Two Timin' Woman* introduces a rock edge laced with slide guitar, while the brooding *I Lied* darkens the mood. With perfect timing, the upbeat psycho-pop anthem *Please* summons you to the dancefloor. There are plenty of twists and turns, but what SIMO do best is deliver authentic blues rock with a contemporary edge. **MA**

9/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *The Raconteurs, Joe Bonamassa*

Rush

R40 (DVD)

This is the seventh live DVD released by the Canadian legends since 2000 and covers a Toronto show from what is very likely to be the band's final tour. If this is indeed the swansong, it's a hell of a way to go out. The set covers the band's entire canon, with both the stage set and guitars changing in keeping with the relevant time period of the song being played. Neil Peart studiously uses two drum kits, while guitarist Alex Lifeson and bassist Geddy Lee dust off all manner of instruments, including a Gibson ES-330, a Paisley Tele, an unusual Ricky 3261 and a Hofner Solid Body 2. The musicianship is staggering, with Lifeson's irreverent style proving the ideal counterpoint to the rhythm section's perfection, and, with the rarely performed likes of *Losing It*, *Jacob's Ladder* and *Lakeside Park* nestling in the set alongside the classics, the music's pretty special too. Thanks guys; it's been a blast. Sniff. **SB**

9/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Dream Theater, Primus*

Nada Surf

YOU KNOW WHO YOU ARE

New York's Nada Surf had an MTV hit on their hands very much in the early Weezer mould with 1996's *Popular*, but the last 15 or so years have seen the band specialise largely in melancholy, harmony-laced power pop. This album is no exception, with several standout tracks such as *Friend Hospital* and *Believe You're Mine* showcasing the band's knack of writing a wistful hook. **CV**

7/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Teenage Fanclub, Death Cab For Cutie*

Savages

ADORE LIFE

We've waited three years for the follow-up to the brutally brilliant *Silence Yourself*. The result is a furious, dark, sexy, sprawling racket. *Adore Life* isn't as immediate as that debut, but Jenny Beth remains a remarkale frontwoman and writer. Perhaps the standout moment is the song *Adore*, begging the question 'is it human to adore life?' against a great seething backdrop of filthy feedback and tremolo. **GW**

7/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *The Stooges, Siouxsie and the Banshees*

Treetop Flyers

PALOMINO

Treetop Flyers' second album is a joyful blast of 1960s West Coast rock. The Flyers display an excellent grasp of melody and the vocal harmonies are a delight. *Sleepless Night* is a glorious pop song and *Lady Luck* extends into some fine soloing that's evocative of Neil Young. The London act have delivered a delightful record that sounds as if it's been beamed directly from Laurel Canyon in the 1960s. **GW**

8/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Neil Young, Midlake*

FEATURED ALBUM

Tedeschi Trucks Band
LET ME GET BY

This third Tedeschi Trucks Band outing is the first produced solely by Trucks, and was recorded at the Swamp Raga studio at the couple's Jacksonville home. It doesn't stray too far from the blueprint laid down by the two previous records, but there's newfound freedom in the arrangements, signalled early on by swaggering horns combining beautifully with the pair's melodies on brooding opener *Anyhow* and the title track. A ramshackle breakdown ends second track *Laugh About It*, capturing a band having genuine fun with their music. Alongside their stock-in-trade loping R&B, the material has the recurring genre motifs of gospel and Philadelphia soul, showcasing Tedeschi's spine-tingling vocals, and there's a sense of the ensemble playing of the 12-piece reaching new levels of dynamics and understanding. Then there's the phenomenon of Trucks' lead playing: whether he's playing a resonator or his trusty SG, playing slide or fingerstyle, for expressive, effortlessly melodic soloing, there's no one on the planet to touch him. **CM**

8/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *The Allman Brothers, Little Feat*

Wolfmother
VICTORIOUS

A decade on from their debut, the Aussie rockers release their third album, recorded with Grammy-winning producer Brendan O'Brien. It echoes the sounds of 13th Floor Elevators as Wolfmother deliver a dose of wonderful psychedelic hard-rock. *The Love That You Give* offers a taste of things to come, followed by the excellent title track. It's good to have you back Wolfmother – keep it coming! **TT**

8/10

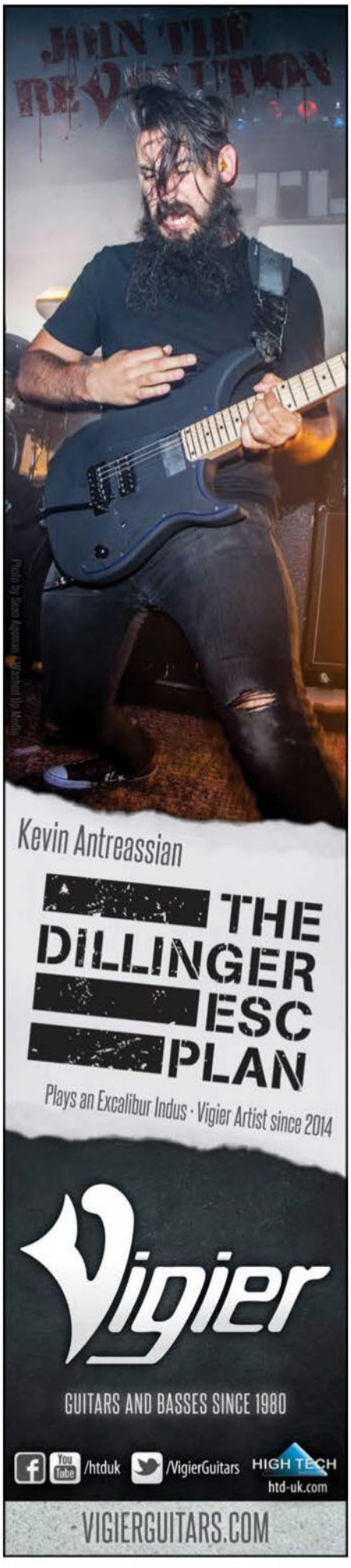
TRY IF YOU LIKE *ZZ Top, Roky Erickson*

The James Hunter Six
HOLD ON

Former Van Morrison backing singer James Hunter's raw and soulful croon finds the perfect setting here, as swinging rhumbas, boleros, bossa novas, and easy rockers get a deliciously retro sonic treatment from Daptone Records' co-founder and producer Bosco Mann. The P-90 bite of Hunter's Les Paul Special is played with supreme taste. Maybe they do make 'em liked they used to, after all... **CV**

8/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *JD McPherson, Ray Charles*



ALEX SKOLNICK

"My Spinal Tap moment..."

Testament's thrash metal supremo and jazz aficionado Alex Skolnick talks influences, good Scotch and piano

1 I couldn't live without my...
"My current main ESP in Silverburst. It's a dream guitar. In recent years I'd been a bit of a classic guitar snob; my original guitar was a Les Paul, I'm partial to an old Goldtop that I use in the studio. I wanted something that had the feel of an Eclipse but the warmth of an old Les Paul."

2 In another life I would be...
"I've been blogging for a few years and written for magazines and books. I love to write. News journalism really interests me."

3 The moment that started it all...
"I'm told as a very young child I was singing Beatles songs – I was too young to even remember. The Beatles have always been with me. And it was the original KISS that made me want to learn guitar and steered me towards hard rock. And everything on that first Van Halen record made me want to play lead guitar."

4 The one that got away...
"My very first Les Paul, it was Cherry Sunburst like Ace Frehley. It was stupid, I sold it when I was about 14 to buy something that was shaped like a Jackson. It was like, out with the old thing, here's the new thing."

5 My Spinal Tap moment...
"I did a few tours for the Trans-Siberian Orchestra in the States and there's one part in the show where the entire group leaves and it's just myself playing acoustic guitar and a vocalist. Somehow there's this curse – this one time we were playing it somebody fainted. The next thing you know, they're wheeling this person out on a stretcher. Another time, one of the lights caught on fire."

6 The best advice I've ever been given...
"Really early on, I was about 14 and going through an Yngwie phase. Joe Satriani was teaching me and he said, 'there's always going to be that guy that everybody's imitating, the flavour of the month. Never put too much focus on that one guy. There's certain signature licks you want to avoid'."

7 The first thing I play when I pick up a guitar...
"I try never to go too fast, there's a bit of a Zen approach. I kind of let the music play itself, which is a technique I learned from [jazz pianist] Kenny Werner. Just letting your hands go where they want to and easing into it."

8 The most important thing on my rider...
"I like a good Scotch. Water is more important, and nuts so there's nutrients. After that, my Scotch."

9 My guiltiest musical pleasure
"I love to play metal, but I don't like to listen to it all the time. People know I devoted years to jazz, so they won't be surprised by that, but a lot of classical piano. And occasionally Thievery Corporation. I'm not a fan of the hipster movement but there's some modern indie-rock that I like."

10 If I could learn to play one thing...
"I love my piano. If I had more time I would spend more time learning piano. And languages."

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